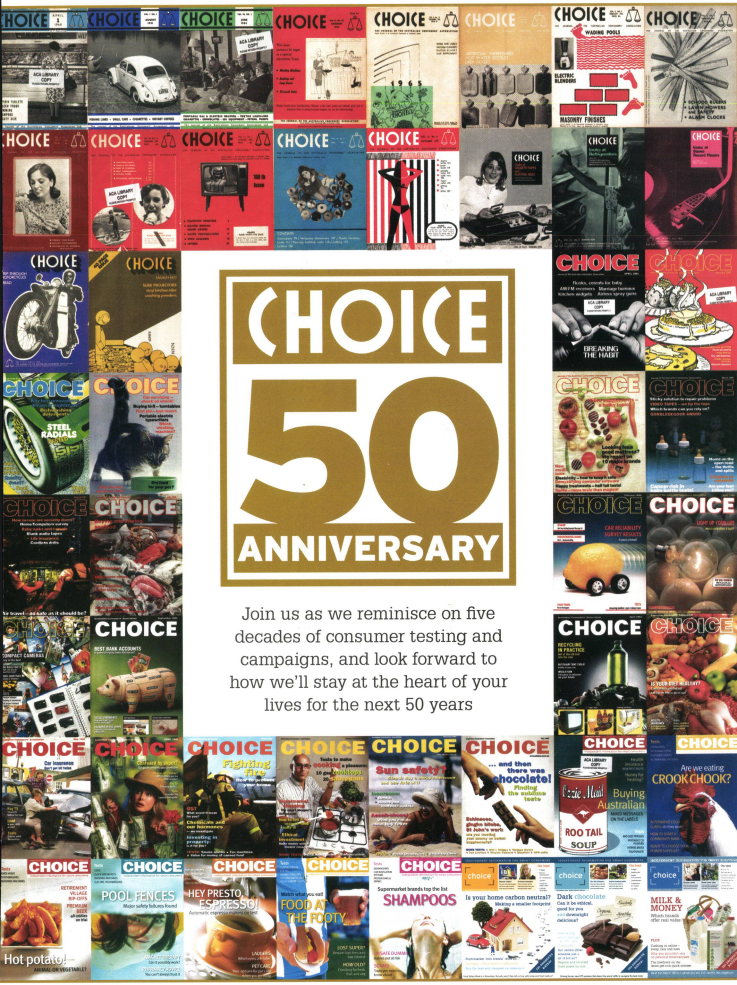
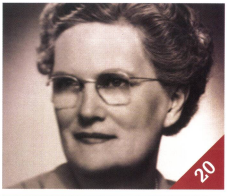
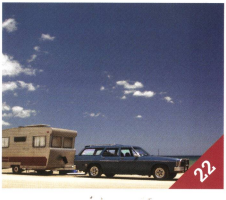

CHOICE
50
ANNIVERSARY
Join us as we reminisce on five decades of consumer testing and campaigns, and look forward to how we'll stay at the heart of your lives for the next 50 years





20 1960 – 1966
How the Australian Consumers' Association was launched over cups of tea in Ruby Hutchison's suburban flat

22 1967 – 1974
When we were all about cars – the Ford v Holden debate, breath testing introduced, and car headrests on test

24 1975 – 1982
Consumer rights get serious with the *Trade Practices Act*; TV goes colour, and will these VCR machines take off?

26 1983 – 1990
The decade of decadence: cordless phones, detachable shoulder pads and mysterious 'home computers' all under the spotlight

28 1991 – 1998
The internet was the 'next big thing'; CHOICE began its long journey down the information superhighway

30 1999 – 2006
Did Y2K really mean the end of the world? And how would a goods and services tax affect you?

32 2007 – 2010
A new CEO, a troubled grocery price monitoring site and a big win against the banks – a tumultuous rounding out of 50 years

Unlocking the power of consumers

The Australian Consumers' Association – aka CHOICE – has had a remarkable half-century of product testing, investigation and advocacy on behalf of all consumers.

What began in 1961 in the Sydney flat of state parliamentarian, Ruby Hutchison, has grown into an iconic and trusted nationwide organisation dedicated to ensuring consumers are given a fair go.

We test everything from washing machines to car tyres, food steamers to smartphones – all independently, with no industry or advertiser bias. But we're also at the forefront of consumer advocacy, working hard to make your voices heard by governments, regulators and manufacturers. And our ongoing investigations continue to expose dodgy practices and bad behaviour.

This month's 14-page supplement takes a nostalgic trip down memory lane as we recall the most significant developments in consumer history and the role we've played in them.

The products may change and companies will come and go, but fundamental issues of health, safety, smart purchasing and sustainability endure. This is what CHOICE is all about.

Turn to page 19 to read our year-by-year retrospective.

CHOICE. Make the right one.

CHOICE gives you the power to choose the very best goods and services, and avoid the worst. We pay full price for the products we test, so we remain 100% independent. We don't take advertising and we don't accept freebies from industry.

We're not a government body and our consumer publishing and advocacy is funded by subscriptions to our magazines, to www.choice.com.au and from other services we supply for the benefit of consumers, such as CHOICE Switch.

CHOICE product ratings are based on lab tests, expert assessments and consumer surveys. CHOICE staff also research a wide range of consumer services. They reveal the truth behind the facts and figures, and investigate the quality and the claims.

SUBSCRIBE CHOICE Plus personal; $32 per quarter for magazine and full online access: ***CHOICE*** personal subscription: one year $82, two years $153; Company/institution: one year $132, two years $253. **ONLINE membership** $21.95 per quarter. ***CHOICE COMPUTER*** personal subscription: One year $42, two years $80 for *CHOICE* subscribers (usually $48/$92); Company/institution: one year $78, two years $146.

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Call 02 9577 3399 or email us at ausconsumer@choice.com.au.

CHOICE EXTRA Free website, www.choiceextra.com.au, for magazine subscribers with an index of articles from Jan/Feb 2002, plus links to PDFs.

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NUMBER CRUNCH

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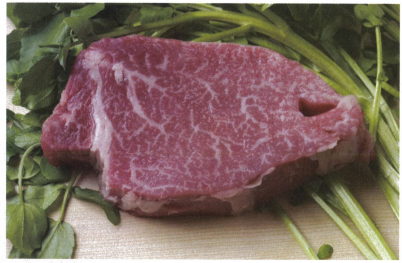
The number of deaths from variant CJD (BSE's human strain) in the UK.



The importation of beef from BSE-affected countries continues to be stalled.

FOOD

What's the beef?

Community outcry has led to additional BSE risk analysis for imported beef.

It will be at least two years before fresh beef from countries other than New Zealand hits Australian shores, despite the recent federal government announcement that the ban on beef imports from BSE-affected countries would be repealed.

On 1 March, the government lifted its ban on importing beef from countries that have a history of recorded cases of BSE (also known as mad cow disease), such as Canada and the UK. But just one week later, in response to widespread community concerns, Tony Burke, Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, announced the 1 March decision would be subject to a regulated import risk analysis (IRA), the timeframe for which is 24 months.

"This is a formal review process with specified time lines, guaranteed opportunities for community engagement and consultation as well as the added assurance of review by the Eminent Scientists Group," said the minister.

The IRA only applies to fresh chilled or frozen beef – and by extension processed beef products made in Australia. But it doesn't apply to some imported processed foods that may contain beef, such as meat pies, ready meals, canned meals, soups and frozen pizzas (although these products, like fresh beef, will still be subject to a food safety risk assessment undertaken by the food regulator, FSANZ). And if you want to avoid these products, the current labelling requirements don't make it easy.

"Manufacturers aren't required to tell you the country of origin of individual ingredients in processed food," said Christopher Zinn, CHOICE Director of Campaigns and Communications. "Our food labelling laws are currently under review, and these changes to BSE policy are timely reminders that country of origin labelling warrants urgent attention. In the meantime we believe it's in the interest of producers and restaurants to proactively label Australian beef ingredients so that consumers who are keen to choose local produce can do so." **RACHEL CLEMONS**

HEALTH

Testing times

Genetic testing comes with its own unique set of health, privacy and insurance risks.

Health insurer NIB recently offered some members half-price DNA tests, claiming they could show whether members were at risk of certain preventable illnesses such as heart disease and some cancers. Members could then undertake lifestyle and other measures to reduce the risk.

But consumers should be very wary of undergoing genetic testing, which can only show whether you have a predisposition to a certain disease, not whether you will actually get the disease (because environmental and lifestyle factors also play a role). If tests show you don't have an elevated risk of contracting a certain disease, this doesn't mean you won't get it, so you may be unduly worried by or overly complacent about the results.

The implications also extend to insurance policies. Anyone who's had a genetic test may be asked to provide results when applying for life insurance. This may influence the cost of premiums or period of cover. Conversely, if it's discovered you've had the tests but didn't reveal this, the insurer may refuse to pay out the policy.

This information may also be available to future employers or other parties that may use this information in ways that are not in your best interests.

For more about genetic testing and health screening, turn to our story on page 64. **KARINA BRAY**

The home insulation and solar hot water schemes are to be replaced by the Renewable Energy Bonus scheme, in which households can receive $1000 rebates for ceiling insulation or solar hot water systems

SUSTAINABILITY

Greened out

How will the government's Energy Efficient Homes Package overhaul affect you?

The Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts has scrapped its Green Loans Program.

The loans included government subsidies to cover a household's interest on borrowing up to $10,000 for up to four years, following the recommendations of the Home Sustainability Assessments. The department is also reviewing current contract applications from assessors to ensure they're appropriately trained to conduct the free home assessments.

However, you can still book assessments by calling the Department (see Contacts, right). The assessments are designed to help consumers reduce their energy and water bills and carbon pollution by changing their energy usage patterns and installing solar hot water systems or photovoltaic panels.

These changes follow a series of fire mishaps caused by poor installation of insulation products and slack regulation of the scheme and the insulation industry. Both the home insulation and solar hot water schemes will be replaced by the Renewable Energy Bonus scheme, where the rebate amounts are reduced – households will receive $1000 rebates for ceiling installation or solar hot water systems, or $600 rebates for heat pump systems.

For ceiling insulation, households rather than installers will be able to claim the $1000 rebate directly through Medicare. All installers will need to re-register their companies, pay a cash bond, prove their installers possess training and skills required, and provide certified quality assurance and occupational health and safety plans.

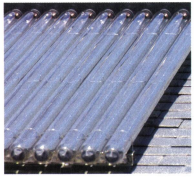
The insulation component of the Renewable Energy Bonus scheme will start on 1 June. If you've already booked an appointment with an insulation or hot water system installer, or would like to find out more on what to do next, contact the department. **TANYA FONG**

CONTACTS

- For home insulation and solar hot water system inquiries, contact the Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts on **1800 808 571** between 8.30am–8pm AEST Monday–Friday (or between 8am–4pm AEST weekends).
- For enquiries on the Green Loans Program, call **1300 778 451** between 8am–6pm AEST Monday–Friday.
- To book a Home Sustainability Assessment, call **1800 895 076** between 9am–5pm AEST Monday–Friday.
- Log on to www.environment.gov.au for more information.

CHOICE ONLINE

Log on to **www.choice.com.au/insulation** to read our buying guide to home insulation.



The Green Loans Program has been scrapped.

UPDATE: LAUNDRY DETERGENTS

In our most recent test of laundry detergents (*CHOICE*, November 2009, page 45), we tested total dissolved solids (TDS) as a measure of how easy it is to recycle waste water. Although the method we used is an industry accepted method, we've since run a more robust analysis of TDS using an alternative method and updated our waste water recycling results. In light of these new results, Biozet Attack Front Loader Fresh & Vibrant detergent no longer satisfies our Green Buy criteria. Also, the number of washes for this product should have read 40, not 20.

Please email us at **ausconsumer@choice.com.au** if you'd like a copy of the revised table, or call on 1800 069 552.

Negative findings about homeopathy in the UK have reignited calls in Australia for the therapy to be banned for children under 12

HEALTH

The homeopathic con

Homeopathy has been ruled scientifically implausible and no better than placebo.

Homeopathy products perform no better than placebos, the use of homeopathy cannot be justified on the current evidence available, and government funding of homeopathy should cease immediately. These are the findings of the UK Science and Technology Committee, which recently undertook an extensive review of homeopathy in the UK.

The news has reignited calls in Australia for homeopathy to be banned for children younger than 12, because parents may not seek appropriate medical treatment or delay it while their child becomes sicker. Authorities are also concerned that parents opposed to immunisation are using homeopathic substitutes, putting their child and others in the community at risk of serious illness or death.

Meanwhile, CHOICE urges consumers to choose therapies with good evidence behind them.

KARINA BRAY

MONEY

Charitable reforms

Proposed reforms of charity regulation stop short of recommending a single national regulator.

A major research report by the Productivity Commission has recommended far-reaching changes to the regulation of Australia's 600,000 charities and not-for-profit organisations, including nationally consistent rules for fundraisers and a single registrar to consolidate Commonwealth regulation.

Referencing a 2008 report and member survey by CHOICE, the Commission recommends consistent public reporting of charities' activities. The report states that "the variability and inconsistency in the way charities communicate key information to donors ... if unaddressed, could potentially erode public confidence and trust in fundraising and hence the public's willingness to participate in or donate to fundraising activities." The Commission recommends a process of "harmonisation" of fundraising regulation rather than reform and replacement with national regulation.

However, Dr Ted Flack, St Vincent de Paul Society Queensland's manager of communications and fundraising, points out that the proposed national regulator will not replace existing state and territory regulation, but rather add an additional regulator.

The Commission's recommendations don't go so far as to recommend the establishment of a single specialist charity regulator, similar to the New Zealand and the UK. The report can be downloaded at www.pc.gov.au. **ALAN DOOLEY**

CAN YOU HELP? THE HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

We're currently researching topics around the health care system, and are interested in hearing about your experiences, any questions you have and issues you're concerned about. Topics include how to find a specialist, bulk billing, public versus private hospital, nursing homes, community care, waiting lists, how to avoid a crisis situation, caring for an elderly relative at home and dementia prevention and care. Please email us at **health@choice.com.au**.

IN BRIEF

LESS SALT, LONGER LIFE

Health expert Dr Peter Clifton, co-author of The CSIRO Total Wellbeing Diet, has urged the food industry to cut back the amount of salt it adds to bread and breakfast cereals. He told a recent meeting of industry leaders that a modest 20% reduction could reduce the number of Australians suffering a heart attack by 16%, and reduce the number of stroke cases by 23%.

HEART THE PARACETAMOL

The Heart Research Institute reports that paracetamol may help prevent heart disease as it blocks myeloperoxidase, an enzyme believed to play major role in the disease. The institute is conducting a trial of the painkiller, and hopes to determine a recommended dosage that acts as a preventive measure against heart disease without causing liver or kidney damage.

WIN FOR WESTPAC

The Federal Court has ruled in favour of Westpac following an action by ASIC, which alleged the bank's distribution of unsolicited MasterCard debit cards to customers to replace EFTPOS-only debit cards was illegal. The court found Westpac's new MasterCard Debit cards were "of the same kind" as the bank's old HandyCard Debit cards. ASIC will not appeal the decision.

CHEMICALS

Consumer chemistry set

Help us to ensure you're properly protected against risky chemicals, plastics and nanotechnology.

With a federal election just around the corner, now's the time to ask: what do you expect from your government when it comes to chemicals?

In the past year, CHOICE has uncovered more than a few cases of unfinished business for nanotechnology, pesticide and plastics regulation in Australia. Risky plastic packaging, undeclared and possibly unsafe nanometals, old risky pesticides such as endosulfan, roach bait ingredients that are not allowed overseas are just some of the issues that demand immediate attention.

CHOICE is calling for a consumer-friendly chemicals policy that:

Nanotechnology

- Requires nanomaterials to be labelled in consumer products, so you can make an informed choice.
- Makes the roll-out of nanomaterials evidence-based, so materials would need to be proven safe first before being released onto the market.

Plastics

- Phases out unnecessary uses of risky plastics such as PVC and polycarbonate in kids' products and food packaging.
- Requires labelling of all plastics, so consumers are given the right to choose.

Pesticides

- Reforms and adequately funds the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA) so its independence is no longer compromised.
- Reviews old chemicals in a timely fashion using current science, and aims to bring softer modern chemicals to market.

Have your say

What would you add to our consumer chemistry set? Have your say at **www.choice.com.au/chemicals** or write to Campaigns, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville, NSW, 2204.

GREENWATCH

A big scoop

CHOICE's GreenWatch campaign notches up another win – this time in the laundry.

Following complaints by CHOICE and 66 active consumers, Seventh Generation has ended false claims that its Natural Laundry Detergent is grey water-safe.

Our laundry detergent test (see Game of Concentration, *CHOICE*, November 2009, page 45) revealed that despite claims on the packet, Seventh Generation's Natural Laundry Detergent is not grey water-safe. In response, we filed a formal complaint with both the company and the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC). Many consumers joined the action online by emailing the company and the Consumer Affairs Minister, Craig Emerson.

Thanks to CHOICE's exacting test method, the company has since established that the measuring cup included in its detergent is too large. When a consumer follows the packet instructions and uses the cup provided, it leads to overdosing (90g instead of 76g). The resulting higher sodium wash water isn't suitable for use as grey water on the garden.

"We're impressed so far with the prompt responses from Seventh Generation's broker to our letters and emails," said Kate Norris, CHOICE Senior Sustianability Policy Officer. "It just shows how through our GreenWatch campaign we can work collaboratively with businesses to improve green claims."

If you're already using Seventh Generation Natural Laundry Detergent, our team of experts advises you should aim for below the recommended "medium" dose line rather than on or above it.

Tell us your story

If you've spotted a green marketing claim that you think needs improving or is just plain wrong, tell us about it at **campaigns@choice.com.au**

Seventh Generation is no longer claiming its detergent is grey water-safe

ONLINE NOTE-TAKING SOFTWARE

Capture, organise, find

Online note-taking software has been around for a while, but few programs are as easy to use and access as Evernote.

Have you ever wanted a perfect memory? Online note-taking tools for your computer are the next best thing. They're convenient, capacious and can capture all sorts of info – from your own notes to web pages, pictures and even audio – and they never forget a thing.

Evernote is a good example. It lets you quickly sort the digital wheat from the chaff by saving selected information to your own online database. You can then access and sort through it in seconds from a net-connected PC or mobile device.

The key to instantly finding your facts, figures and photos is "tagging" information as you put it into Evernote. Just click on a tag and Evernote will show you all notes with the same tag. Text notes, web clippings or whole pages and pictures can be grabbed with a single click. Evernote even lets you store audio and voice recordings, and you can also email notes, pictures and audio directly to your Evernote account.

Evernote is a dream for researchers, hobbyists and students. Just browse the web and clip any bits you like into Evernote. You can use various computers and mobile devices, including Windows, Mac, iPhone, Android, BlackBerry, Palm and Windows Mobile. Information is synchronised automatically to bring your latest notes up to date, no matter what device they were created on.

EVERNOTE
Price Free (40MB/month)
Contact www.evernote.com
★★★★★

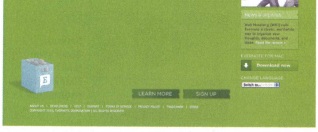
A free Evernote account has a limit of 40MB per month, which should satisfy most users for notes and web clippings. Enthusiastic picture-snappers can upgrade to the 500MB/month premium account for about $5 a month and get additional features such as multi-user collaboration, offline access for users of the Evernote App for iPhone and iPod Touch, text search within PDFs, stronger security and no advertising.

Online note-taking has been around for a while, so Evernote is not alone. Google's Notebook program was popular until development was stopped in 2009, but there's also Zoho Notes (notebook.zoho.com), Yahoo Notepad (notepad.yahoo.com), Notefish (www.notefish.com), Fruitnotes (fruitnotes.com), Ubernote (ubernote.com) and many more.

However, few programs give you such easy capture and access to wide variety of data types across multiple platforms as Evernote. Never again will you have to ask, "Now where did I see that...?" Don't forget to give it a try.

For more reviews and tests of software, tech tools and gadgets, see *CHOICE Computer*. To subscribe, call 1800 069 552 (toll-free) or go to **www.choice.com.au/magazines**

STEVE DUNCOMBE



Never forget another website or file again with Evernote.

GLASS KETTLE

Glassy by design

This glass kettle confirms style is no substitute for ease of use.

Sunbeam's cordless glass kettle displays well in any kitchen. Its main body material is glass, with a plastic power base and pourer and chrome handle. It features a sensor-touch control that automatically cuts off at the end of the boiling cycle, and a removable lid with a wide opening for easy filling. It has a stainless steel flooring that supposedly reduces scale build-up, and its element is hidden underneath the flooring, making it easier to clean.

The kettle's control is easy to use and its wide opening makes filling simple, but the handle is hard-edged and narrow, making it uncomfortable and straining on the wrist when lifting and tilting to pour. The kettle has no spout, so there is a wide instead of direct pour into your cup. Also, the removable lid can be awkward to grip and remove due to the suction of its rubber seal.

The kettle takes more than three minutes to boil one litre of water, which compared with other kettles is quite long. The manufacturer claims to use heat-resistant glass, and when CHOICE tested this, we found the temperature of the surface after boiling was 55°C, which is below dangerous levels. And a transparent kettle has the added advantage of allowing you to see when it needs descaling.

CHOICE VERDICT

The Sunbeam Designer Series Glass Kettle does its job and is stylish; however, style comes at a cost, not just of a few extra dollars, but also in its ease of use. **REBECCA GATTO**

SUNBEAM DESIGNER SERIES GLASS KETTLE KE9400
Price $140
Contact www.sunbeam.com.au
★★★☆☆

COMING

Fry pans

With non-stick fry pans costing between $30 and more than $200, how much do you really need to spend to ensure your pan cooks evenly, is easy to use and will stand the test of time? Our latest round of testing finds a fry pan that's just as good as the top-cost models, but at half the price.

Clothes dryers

Heat pump dryers are back on the market in response to the demand for more energy-efficient appliances. We compare the latest heat pump, electric and gas-powered dryers to find out which are cheapest to run over time.

Noise cancelling headphones

If you're looking for a little peace and quiet on your next trip – whether it's your train ride to work or a long flight overseas – these headphones are designed to cancel out ambient noise. Find out which sets do this job well, are comfortable to wear and easy to use.

3D TV

It's all around you

Three-dimensional technology will soon be available on your home TV – but is it any good?

Currently there's a lot of buzz around 3D TV – no doubt partly fuelled by the success of three-dimensional (3D) movies such as *Avatar* and *Alice in Wonderland*. But for now, no 3D TVs are available to buy in Australia.

Panasonic and Sony invited CHOICE to view two of their 3D TVs. The TVs we watched were pre-production models, so things could change by the time they hit the retail stores later this year.

Panasonic's demonstration TV was a top-of-the-range (1920 x 1080) 127cm plasma with special processing hardware and software that handles the 3D processing, but you can also watch it as a normal two-dimensional (2D) TV. By contrast, the technology that produces three dimensions on Sony's LCD 3D TV isn't the same as plasma, but you still have to wear special glasses, so from a viewer's perspective there's not much difference.

The Panasonic system requires you to be within line-of-sight of the TV in order for the glasses to synchronise with the TV's pulsing of the image. In the demonstration we saw, there was occasionally just a slight delay if you turned away from the screen, resulting in a very brief flicker as the glasses realigned themselves.

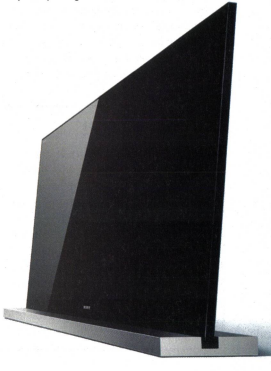
Another issue with the glasses is cost. Panasonic is suggesting only one or two pairs will be supplied with the TV, so having friends over to watch a movie could be an expensive event (glasses for 3D cinema can't be used). The Sony glasses look similar, but in their demonstration, moving off-axis or rotating your head – as you would if you were lying on your side – resulted in a noticeable loss of definition and 3D effect. In anticipation of the release of their own 3D TV, Samsung have priced their glasses at $US149 a pair.

The 3D image on both the Panasonic and Sony screens appears blurry and the colours are out of alignment when viewed without the special glasses, but 2D images are just as crisp as you'd expect from a TV of this specification. With the glasses on, the Panasonic 3D illusion is convincing in its depth and the detail appeared to be just as good as with a 2D image. The Sony was less convincing and seemed a bit jittery, but such glitches may be sorted out when these products hit the shelves in June or July.

PANASONIC HD 3D TV / SONY 3D TV
Contact www.panasonic.com.au, www.sony.com.au
NOT RATED

CHOICE VERDICT

We haven't star-rated these TVs, as the prototypes we saw will not necessarily be the same as the TVs that consumers will be able to buy at the shops later this year. However, based on what we've seen so far, 3D TV isn't very compelling. **CHRIS RUGGLES**



YOUR SAY

Your experiences help our research and often let other readers know about scams and rip-offs. Positive responses you've had to a complaint you took to a manufacturer, retailer, importer or tradesperson interest us too, so please email ausconsumer@choice.com.au or mail to Letters, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville, NSW 2204.

Paper chase

Has CHOICE considered commenting on the recent development of companies charging customers an extra $2 per month if they wish to continue receiving paper bills?

Many of these companies have term fixed-price contracts with customers. For example, I have a 24-month contract with Virgin Mobile at $30 a month. When it started, this contract included the expectation of being billed on paper. Yet suddenly, mid-contract, I received a self-congratulatory letter about how much Virgin cares about the environment – the result of which is not that, should I elect to receive electronic bills, they will reduce my bill by $2 a month (per their reduced expenses of postage and printing), but that they will increase it if I don't. In other words, they're using environmental righteousness as a smokescreen for increasing their profit margin on every telephone contract in Australia by $2 over the agreed price.

At $2 per person, per company, per month, across all Australian telephone contracts with at least Optus and Virgin and I'm sure many more, this is a major act of profiteering by Australian telcos that must run into millions of dollars. Consumers seem defenceless, which is why these companies are getting away with it. We need a voice in this matter.

Matthew Williams, Houghton, SA

CHOICE SAYS We agree with Matthew that these extra charges are unfair, and unfortunately the consumers who are most likely to incur these fees are often those who can least afford them. We believe these companies should offer their customers carrots in terms of a discount for receiving an electronic bill, rather than a $2 stick for staying with paper. And those who choose to receive a paper bill may have noticed the irony that the envelope in which the bill arrives is often stuffed full of pamphlets and marketing material – a practice at odds with the companies' environmental pretentions.

CHOICE had some success late last year campaigning for Telstra to drop its $2 "pay to pay in person" fee, and we've got our sights firmly set on other telcos to do the same. We've received feedback from members who earned exemptions from these fees after a polite but firm conversation with their telco provider, so perhaps Matthew should try and see if he can do same. Meanwhile, we'll keep on the case.

Creative writing

We recently engaged the services of an established, reputable company to design and build a timber deck and verandah. The end result was a fabulous new outdoor entertaining area with which we were very satisfied. I happily provided the company with a number of digital photos of the finished project and invited them to use these for marketing purposes. They were very grateful and gave us two bottles of wine in appreciation. Although I had intended to write a letter of recommendation for them to use, I never got around to writing it.

Several months later, a prominent advertisement in the South Australian *Sunday Mail* showed the three photos

THUMBS UP!

Sue Rigato of Munruben, QLD, and **Hilary Ash** of Elsternwick, Vic., both praise Sunbeam. Sue's Café Series blender gave her problems after three years of use. When she took it back to David Jones where she'd bought it, the Sunbeam representative was in the store and gave Sue a new blender, no questions asked. The element of Hilary's kettle burnt out after 18 months, well past its warranty period. Sunbeam sent a courier to collect the kettle and replaced it free of charge.

Len Reynolds of Bangor, NSW, gives a thumbs up to Electrolux. His new Simpson top-loading washing machine left lint on the washing. After trying unsuccessfully to fix this, Electrolux (which owns Simpson) took the machine back and refunded Len's money. They even collected the machine on the day and at the exact time arranged.

Julie McCamley of Hamilton Hill, WA, is very impressed by Wusthof's customer service. She broke the tip off her cooks' knife after 10 years of use. It was a type of knife that retails for more than $250, so she sent it back to Wusthof hoping to have it repaired. Julie was delighted when Wusthof replaced her knife free of charge.

Terry Johnson of Seddon, Vic, gives a thumbs up to Raco. Terry's 25-year-old saucepan is now as good as ever after Raco supplied a new handle, completely free of charge.

I had supplied. To my horror, a detailed testimonial letter was attached to these photos, thanking the company for the superb job they had done and referring to the inclusion of a few photos of the finished verandah. This testimonial, signed "Mary T", was completely fabricated.

I was flabbergasted at the audacity of the company using a completely invented letter and associated photos to advertise its products and services. I felt they had taken advantage of my goodwill and dishonestly represented our opinions to add credibility to their reputation. Surely using a fake testimonial letter is false advertising and deliberating misleading consumers?

Belinda Baliga, Houghton, SA

CHOICE SAYS There may well be misleading or deceptive conduct (which is prohibited by the *Trade Practices Act* and state laws) if the layout of the advertisement gives the impression that the testimonial letter refers to the deck and verandah shown in the photo. However, the comment might have come from another satisfied customer, so there may be no misrepresentation of the quality of the product or service.

There are also copyright issues. Belinda owns copyright in her photos and also a "moral right to attribution" as the creator of the photos. By allowing the company to use them in their promotions, she has granted them a licence. Whether the use of the photos goes beyond that licence and whether the company infringed her moral rights would have to be determined by a court in light of all the facts. It is unlikely Belinda would want to take it that far, but she would be well within her rights to ask the company to stop using her photos in their promotional material.

Free-range porkies?

Several months ago, I sent an Animals Australia petition to Coles and Woolworths regarding the cruelty of pig farming, accompanied by my own spiel on the issue. I received a response from a customer relations officer at Coles, but nothing from Woolworths. The Coles representative assured me they are doing all they can to ensure ethical practice prevails and that RSPCA standards are met. She also informed me that Coles provides bacon and ham products labelled "bred free-range".

As a CHOICE magazine subscriber, I read some time ago that this term was misleading as the piglets only have access to the outdoors for the first few weeks of their lives and are then kept in stalls or crates. I raised this point with the Coles representative, who claimed the "bred free-range" pigs are only enclosed in these stalls or crates when they're about to give birth and immediately after.

I would like to draw your attention to this matter, as I feel deceived and would like to make the public aware of this deception.

Andrea Osborne, Moorooka, Qld

CHOICE SAYS "Bred free-range" is certainly confusing and consumers would benefit from a more meaningful term. Unfortunately there's no nationally consistent legal definition of what "free-range" actually means. According to the Free Range Pork Farmers Association, free-range pigs must have access to open pasture and shelter at all times, but "bred free-range" only means that the piglets were born to sows not confined in stalls or farrowing crates. Once weaned, the pigs can be transferred to crowded pens or eco-shelters (large sheds where the pigs are housed on straw).

EMAIL OF THE MONTH

iRip-off

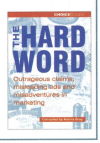
I have just compared what I pay to download iTunes in Australia with the US price. I'm stunned by the sheer scale and effrontery of the rip-off by Apple's Australian iTunes website. Typically, a download that costs me $A2.19 here is only $US1.29 from the US site. This means at the current exchange rate I'm paying 51% more than the US price.

If I try to buy a download from the US site it bumps me off – yet I can buy CDs from the US via Amazon.com and still pay the US price. What's going on?

Ian Gillies, Berowra, NSW

CHOICE SAYS Apple told CHOICE that prices depend on agreements with content providers on a country-by-country basis – but that can't be the whole story. Apple can charge more because they know we will pay more – it's hard to believe that the differences in price aren't also due to lack of competition for online music purchases in Australia.

However, consumers can fight back. Sites such as www.priceusa.com.au allow you to buy products direct from the US, including American iTunes cards that can be used back in Australia at discounted rates. The fact that you still come out ahead when companies can afford to purchase the product in the US, charge a 5% fee and ship the card directly to you in Australia, reinforces just how inflated iTunes prices really are.



EMAIL OF THE MONTH Ian receives *The Hard Word*, or any other book of his choice at **www.choice.com.au/books**. Unfortunately we are unable to answer all the emails and letters we receive. We may edit or print only an extract of emails and letters in the magazine.

Our 50th anniversary provides us with an ideal opportunity for renewal and to reflect upon our rich and fascinating history

COMMENT

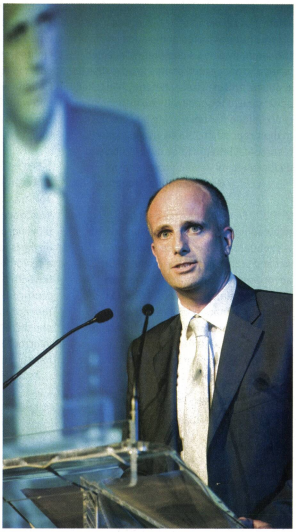
Building our future on 50 years of success

Welcome to this special issue, which celebrates 50 years of CHOICE as Australia's leading consumer champion. I hope you enjoy reading about our rich and fascinating history. CHOICE is a national icon, but being successful in the past is no guarantee of success in the future. Our 50th anniversary is an ideal opportunity for renewal, and also reminds us that our goal is to be now, as then, an indispensable ally for consumers.

Consumers' needs are changing fast, and we need to match and exceed that pace to remain relevant to you, our members, and to the ever-expanding network of people who want to benefit from our information, advice and support. The way governments and companies operate has also changed, and so must our approach to how we influence them and bring about change for all consumers.

We have ambitious and exciting plans for the next three years. All this work is designed to help us fulfil our purpose: to unlock the power of consumers and for Australians to be the most savvy and active consumers in the world.

We know that life has improved for consumers over the past 50 years because of CHOICE, and this year, we're recognising other people's efforts too, through the first CHOICE Consumer Action Award (see opposite). In the coming years, we want to be able to say we dared to dream that Australians could be the most savvy and active consumers in the world; that as a result we've reached out to millions of consumers who would never have previously seen themselves as CHOICE people; and that we reflected less on our legacy and much more on being an important resource for consumers, at the heart of every household.



CHOICE CEO Nick Stace at the inaugural 2010 CHOICE Awards

OUR AMBITIONS

A closer relationship with you

Our members come first, second and third in our list of priorities. So that we keep on top of what you expect from CHOICE, both in our products and our campaigning work, we'll be finding new ways to get even closer to you in the coming months and years.

We'll be increasing our member surveys that you can participate in, so you can share your thoughts on everything from best mobile phone carriers to the best chains to shop at for household and electronic appliances. We'll talk to you where you live and shop, starting with a roadshow touring the country. I will continue to take your calls on the issues that matter to you, and there'll be more opportunities to talk to us online via **www.choice.com.au**. We'll also be holding more of our increasingly popular lab tours, so that you can see up close how we conduct the tests you read about every month.

Fantastic products

The way we live our lives is changing at a tremendously fast pace; to be relevant in your lives we need to make sure CHOICE is giving you what you want, when and where you want it, and in a format that's right for you. Whether you're doing armchair research, or faced with a bewildering array of products in a department store

and need some instant advice on Best Buys and Green Buys, we'll be on hand to help you through.

This will inevitably mean not only enhancing what we currently offer you, but also developing exciting new products and services with real relevance and appeal. Over the coming months, based on member interest, we'll be adding iPhone applications and e-reader capacity as well as enabling you to buy products offline and online. CHOICE Shopper already provides an excellent service, and we're looking at how we can improve upon that.

Better value

We'll be using your feedback to offer more value for your membership. We've already added to a range of free guides available through our customer service centre, in 2009 we launched a fabulous and improved website at **www.choice.com.au,** and from next issue we'll be improving the quality of your magazine's paper while making sure we choose a sustainable option.

Greater influence

CHOICE is proud of how we've improved consumers' lives over the past half-century. Without our lobbying, it is doubtful whether the New South Wales government would have established a Consumer Affairs Council in the mid-1960s, which ultimately led to the evolution of so many consumer protection laws and practices, especially the landmark Commonwealth *Trade Practices Act*.

Without our investigation in the mid-1990s into consumer complaints about a now-infamous faulty gas heater that turned into a flame-thrower, there would have been no product recall of the offending item.

And without our Fair Fees campaign, last year the banks would not have been forced into scrapping or substantially reducing unfair penalty fees, saving consumers an estimated $500 million a year.

Our ambition now is to have a bigger impact on a smaller number of consumer issues; to involve you and the wider consumer community in getting more deeply involved in our campaigns; and for you to take action with us on the everyday issues that really matter to you (our recently launched supermarkets' campaign at **www.checkoutchoice.com.au** is a case in point).

As always, if you have any comments, questions or ideas you'd like to share with us, please call me on **1800 266 786**.

Nick Stace, CEO

CONSUMER ACTION AWARD

The winner is: Ian Jarratt

Ian Jarratt's devotion to unit pricing makes him a worthy recipient of our inaugural Consumer Action Award

In this our 50th anniversary year we have launched the CHOICE Awards, to recognise the very best products and services in Australia. You can read all about the winners on page 6, but here we'd like to pay tribute to the winner of our inaugural Consumer Action Award, Ian Jarratt.

When you see the price per 100g or 100mL alongside the shelf price of most items in supermarkets, you're witnessing the lasting legacy of Ian's advocacy in action. The arrival of a national mandatory unit pricing (UP) scheme for pre-packaged groceries at the end of 2009 was due to his drive, zeal and eye for detail.

As a researcher and campaigner with the volunteer-only Queensland Consumer Association, Ian wanted Australia to enjoy the benefits of a world-class system of UP. The pricing mechanism allows consumers to compare value easily across brands and different-sized packages, and has been in use in Europe and some parts of North America for 25 years.

But Ian appreciated there could be many pitfalls in any scheme without consumer advocates focusing forensic attention on the small print of the code retailers might follow. To prove his point and get detailed information on UP overseas, he was the worthy recipient of a Churchill Fellowship and visited the USA and four European nations in 2007. He followed this with many detailed written submissions to politicians, governments and the 2008 Australian Competition and Consumer Commission grocery inquiry. Ian then helped CHOICE participate in widespread consultations over the then proposed plan.

Now we have unit pricing, but Ian is not resting on his laurels. He's still fighting for improvements in terms of legibility, prominence and consumer education about the scheme.

For his tireless, selfless and modest devotion to a singular cause to benefit consumers and his continuing work to make it better, Ian Jarratt has demonstrated himself a worthy recipient of this Award.

STORY DENIS GALLAGHER

THE 2010 CHOICE AWARDS

CHOICE proudly acknowledges the top-performing companies and retailers of the past year.

For years we've named and shamed retailers and manufacturers with our Shonkys (see *CHOICE*, November 2009), but now it's time to offer bouquets to the top-performing companies and products over the past 12 months with our inaugural CHOICE Awards. CHOICE members have voted for the Best Retailer as well, and as part of our 50th year celebrations, we're presenting the CHOICE Heritage Award to the company that has delivered consistently good products and services over the past half-century.

CHOICE Award categories

- **People's CHOICE Award – Best Retailer**
- **Best Baby Brand**
- **Best Technology Innovator**
- **Best Food Endorsement Program**
- **Best Low-Fee Bank Account**
- **The CHOICE Heritage Award**

The award short lists have come from hundreds of product tests and research projects by CHOICE during 2009-2010, while the short-listed companies for the CHOICE Heritage Award have consistently performed well over 50 years of testing.

The winner in each category is determined by a panel of CHOICE experts in each field, with the exception of the People's CHOICE Award, which was opened up to our 180,000 members to be determined by popular vote.

PEOPLE'S CHOICE AWARD – BEST RETAILER

More than 1000 CHOICE members went online, sent a fax or mailed us to deliver their vote for the most consumer-friendly retailer for 2009. It's clear from your comments that two things always win you over – good value and being able to speak with someone who knows what they're talking about. Almost 500 local retailers received votes of confidence, however our short-listed top 10 retailers combined attracted 60% of the vote.

Award criteria

- Customer service
- Value for money
- Product knowledge
- After-sales service

Short list

- Aldi
- Apple
- Bing Lee
- Bunnings
- David Jones
- Dick Smith
- The Good Guys
- Harvey Norman
- JB Hi-Fi
- Myer

WINNER: THE GOOD GUYS

According to CHOICE members, The Good Guys are indeed really good guys. Many voters said that staff are knowledgeable about the products they sell, as well as willing to match or beat competitors' price offers.

Runners up: Harvey Norman and JB Hi-Fi

Although The Good Guys won by a significant margin, Harvey Norman finished strongly in second place, followed closely by JB Hi-Fi. Stores with a big home electronic focus attracted favourable comments, particularly about staff being able to deal with customer requests without appearing patronising or putting them under undue pressure.

David Jones and Aldi finished just outside the top three, suggesting there is a place in the market for both premium service and extremely price-competitive products (even though Aldi may not have as great a variety of products as the Big Two supermarkets).

Other deserving retailers were Myer and Bunnings. Dick Smith and Apple are popular tech shop stops, while Bing Lee rounds out the top 10 retailers as voted by you.

Rolling rig tests a stroller's long-term durability

Ensuring a high chair won't catch small fingers

BEST BABY BRAND

The philosophy behind our testing of baby products is safety and reliability, built on 50 years of research and feedback by consumers and relevant industry safety bodies. The short-listed companies for Best Baby Brand provide a wide range of baby and toddler products, from strollers and walkers to carriers and cots for the home or travelling family.

When we judged this category, we ruled out any brand that was subject to a recall in 2009. And because we don't test every product a brand makes, we also checked that the regulators haven't spotted any problems.

Award criteria

- Safety
- Reliability
- Ease of use
- Readily available
- Variety

Short list

- Bébé Care
- Childcare
- Love N Care

WINNER: LOVE N CARE

Love N Care's products were recommended five times in 2008/09 (one high chair, two strollers and two cots). In our baby sling and change table tests, their models were rated as "worth considering". No Love N Care products were not recommended. Most major baby brands are represented several times in our 2008/09 tests, but all except Love N Care failed at least once.

Love N Care makes a wide range of baby products, including strollers, cots, portable cots, change tables, bassinets, high chairs, baths, baby monitors and furniture. Their products are available in many stores across all states and territories, including major retail chains such as Babies Galore. There were no Love N Care recalls listed in the 2008/09 period.

Runners up: Childcare and BébéCare

Childcare had six recommended products in 2008/09 (a high chair, change table, two cots and two strollers), but its Captiva stroller failed a safety test. BébéCare had three recommended products in 2008/09 (two strollers, one cot), but its Orion stroller failed a durability test.

We also considered companies such as Weeride, which makes a recommended child seat for bicycles – but making one product well isn't as impressive as making a wide range of good-quality products.

BEST TECHNOLOGY INNOVATOR

For the 2009 Best Technology Innovator Award, the winning company had to meet our criteria and deliver innovative products over the past 12 months.

Award criteria

- Innovation
- Value
- Transparency
- Social benefits
- Competition
- Reliability

Short list

- Google
- Amazon
- Apple

WINNER: GOOGLE

Google continues to release innovative products, which are often completely free for consumers to use.

In 2009 Google released Android, a new open-source smartphone operating system that promises to give the iPhone a run for its money; Google Wave, a new take on communication and collaboration tools; and Google Chrome, competing with browsers such as Microsoft Internet Explorer and Mozilla Firefox. Chrome also came top in *CHOICE Computer's* Jan/Feb 2010 browser test comparing performance, features and compliance with web standards.

Google also takes social responsibility seriously. In response to the Haiti earthquake, appeals were posted on the Google homepage – the most viewed webpage in the world – with no promotion of any kind. And in a widely supported decision, Google has threatened to pull out its entire business from China, the world's largest market, over alleged censorship by the government.

Runners up: Apple and Amazon

Apple's domination has been building over the past few years in the music player market with its innovative iPod range, and has also established the iPhone as the "must have" smartphone for 2009. Amazon has driven the adoption of the ebook with Kindle and electronic book distribution, although the Kindle's impact has yet to be significantly felt in Australia. The Apple iPad launches later in 2010 and along with the Kindle ebook readers should successfully compete with the traditional paperback novel. >

Google's innovation extends to its workspace

You can trust most food endorsement programs

BEST FOOD ENDORSEMENT PROGRAM

< A range of endorsement programs and logos has been developed for consumers who want to choose healthier or more sustainable food – yet consumers don't always know the level of integrity underpinning these programs and which ones they can rely on to be confident of their choices.

This award identifies the best food endorsement programs and logos that consumers can trust to guide their healthy or sustainable food choices.

Award criteria

- Transparency
- Consumer friendly
- No conflict of interest
- Stakeholder engagement
- Accessible to businesses of all sizes
- Independent verification

Short list

- Australian Certified Organic (ACO)
- Dolphin Safe
- Fair Trade
- Free Range Egg & Poultry Australia Ltd (FREPA)
- Glycemic Index Symbol
- Heart Foundation Tick
- NASAA Certified Organic
- OGA Certified Organic
- Rainforest Alliance Certified
- RSPCA Approved Farming Scheme

WINNER: AUSTRALIAN CERTIFIED ORGANIC (ACO)

When CHOICE assessed Australian Certified Organic, it was one of only two programs that met all our criteria. Our member poll also determined that ACO's logo was more widely recognised and more influential than our runner up, the NASAA logo.

ACO conducts annual, onsite third-party verification of producers or companies endorsed by its program. It's transparent about standards, governance and how it's funded, and it ticked all the boxes for consumer friendliness, which we consider vital given it's consumers who are using the logos to buy products and ultimately support the programs. ACO has mechanisms in place to avoid and manage conflict of interest; standards are open to broad public and industry consultation; and the program is accessible to producers and companies of all sizes.

As the ACO's logo was more widely recognised and more influential than NASAA's, ACO is our overall winner.

Runner up: National Association for Sustainable Agriculture, Australia (NASAA)

This program was the only other program assessed that met all of our award criteria. Both ACO and NASAA are accredited by several international regulatory groups and the Australian Quarantine Inspection Service (AQIS) as organic certifying organisations.

NAB's Classic Banking account is our winner

BEST LOW-FEE BANK ACCOUNT

This Award highlights examples of two banks moving in the right direction for consumers. The two new accounts that met the criteria for this year's Award will help get more money back into consumers' pockets and reduce the cost of everyday banking.

Award criteria

- Full transaction account functionality
- Fee-free for most everyday transactions
- No monthly fee or penalty fees
- No requirement to bundle with another product of the financial institution
- No requirement to make monthly contributions

Short list

- ING Direct Orange Everyday
- NAB Classic Banking

WINNER: NAB CLASSIC BANKING

NAB Classic Banking has no penalty fees, monthly fee or fees for most everyday transactions. Unlike ING Direct, it doesn't require ATM withdrawals of at least $200 to avoid fees. Its low fees are open to all, not just those depositing their salary each month.

NAB recently dropped the $5 monthly account fee that applied to its standard transaction account. The Big Four bank also showed genuine leadership by abolishing overdrawn account fees on personal transaction and savings accounts, the most common source of customer complaints.

Runner up: ING Direct Orange Everyday

ING has no ATM or branch network in Australia, but customers can use other banks' ATMs and Australia Post's Bank@Post for deposits and withdrawals. Third-party ATM fees apply, but are rebated for transactions of at least $200, and when customers use their debit card to get at least $200 cash out from a retailer; ING puts 50c into their account (smaller cash-out withdrawals are fee-free). ING does not charge penalty fees; like most banks, interest applies to overdrawn accounts. For more information on these and other transaction accounts, see page 73 or log on to **www.choice.com.au/money**

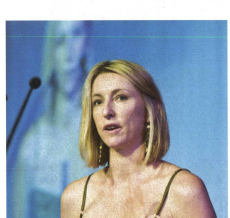
THE CHOICE HERITAGE AWARD

CHOICE has tested thousands of products over the years. To celebrate our 50th anniversary, this Award is given to our most consistently recommended brand over the past 50 years. Several companies have consistently delivered quality, performance and ease of use across a range of household and entertainment products.

Award criteria

During our 50 years of serving consumers, we've confidently recommended many products to our members. The short list for this Award, Sony, Panasonic and Philips, have earned their place because of the number of products included in our 'What to Buy' or 'Recommended' lists over the past five decades.

TVs are among our most popular tests, and just one of the home electronics products where our short-listed companies have been fighting for prime position. When colour arrived in Australia



Accepting the Heritage Award for Panasonic

in 1975 we tested the latest massive 63cm colour TVs and all three brands scored well. As the decades progressed, Philips, Panasonic and Sony jockeyed for top brand, with Sony's Trinitron CRT TV enjoying some dominance in the 1990s and Panasonic scoring well in the 21st century with its plasma TVs.

Short list

- Panasonic
- Sony
- Philips

WINNER: PANASONIC

Panasonic has the highest number of recommended models across a wide range of products over the past 40 years, and was among the top three brands in the 1960s and early 1970s when trading as National.

Runners up: Sony and Philips

Sony and Philips have become part of the Australian home landscape since the introduction of home hi-fi entertainment in the 1960s. In the 1970s, CHOICE testers identified the effect companies such as Sony and Philips were having on the Australian home entertainment landscape since the arrival of TV, as they marvelled at the emerging concept of devoting entire rooms in new houses to watching TV. ■

DID YOU KNOW?

Back to the future: 1979

There was a time when free-to-air television was not only the dominant form of visual electronic entertainment at home, it was the only choice. Back in the 1970s, viewing options were Channel 7, Channel 9, the ABC ("Channel 2") and the fledgling Channel 10. With only four channels to choose from, consumers were desperate to watch as many of the few available shows as possible.

A test of VCRs by CHOICE in 1979 revealed how much consumers were willing to pay to exercise their right to watch what they wanted, when they wanted. All three of our short-listed Heritage Award companies – Panasonic (National at the time), Sony and Philips – were represented. At the time, the CHOICE tester said that "although still expensive at $1000 to $1500, video cassette recorders or VCRs that can capture TV programs off the air have also captured the imagination – and discretionary income – of consumers everywhere".

VCRs had only been on the Australian market for little more than a year, and already our tester saw trouble brewing about which format to use. While most of us are familiar with the BETA/VHS format war of the early 1980s, some may not know that early users of VCRs had a third tape format to consider. The Philips VCR used the Philips 2000 tape format, while Sony used Betamax and Panasonic/National used VHS tape. While we all know which tape won out in the end, our tester suggested it might be a good idea to hold off buying a VCR until the companies had decided on a common format.

Finally, our CHOICE tester gazed into his crystal ball and suggested that prerecorded tapes, where consumers could buy or rent movies, may prove popular.

VIDEO CASSETTE RECORDERS

We test six models of an expensive electronic gadget which is selling despite competing tape speeds, cassette sizes, and recording formats.

Video cassette recorders (or video tape recorders) are the latest electronic playback gadget on the AV take-also marketed the video recorder is the most sophisticated home of entertainment. Despite its sophisticated features, selling prices and the confusion and bafflement of the television industry, consumer video cassette recorders (VCRs) are not expected to flounder as did quadraphonic hi-fi and expensive hire and have been in the shops since 1975 and the manufacturers' recording time (our purchase tests of the machines' recording time) have reached the point where they are attractive to at least some consumers. Sales are also expected to show growth potential this year. Retailers and manufacturers

Cassette types come in various shapes and sizes

...around the home in 1979 to be about 30 000 units.

The war of the formats

...the VCR market is in a state of turbulence as you attempt to make a decision. Not only are you faced with choosing how to a tape you want recorded, but also the manufacturers are busy in competition with each other to see who can produce more gadgets for your money.

...minutes of recording on a cassette of about the size of a book. The tape is 12.7 mm (half an inch) wide and 240 metres long. It also doesn't have the kind of cassette that you can simply drop into the machine. You have to thread the tape through a complicated mechanism before the machine will operate. Some machines require you to thread the tape yourself, others do it automatically when you push the cassette in. Cassette types come in various shapes and sizes. The most common is the VHS (video home system) cassette, which is typically the largest. It measures 187 mm by 103 mm by 25 mm. Another cassette is the Philips N1500 which is about the size of a paperback book. Sony's Betamax cassette is smaller again, but not much smaller than the Philips. Sharp has introduced a fifth cassette which is smaller again than the others. It is called Compact Video and measures 125 mm by 70 mm by 21 mm. Sharp's cassette is the only one of the four that is not a loading cassette; you

Table 1

Model	Manufacturer	Country of manufacture	RRP* (Price tested)	Playback	Recording	Recording time	Remote control	Real-time counter
Philips N1500	Philips Consumer Electronics Pty Limited	Japan	1000-1100	N, 5, 8, 11	Philips 2000	8/16 hours	Yes	Yes
JVC HR-3300	JVC (Australia) Pty Limited	Japan	1000-1100	N, 5, 8, 11	VHS	8/16 hours	Yes	Yes
National NV-3000	National Panasonic (Australia) Pty Limited	Japan	1000-1200	N, 5, 8, 11	VHS	8/16 hours	Yes	Yes
Sharp VC-7000	Sharp Electronics (Australia) Pty Limited	Japan	1000-1200	N, 5, 8, 11	Compact Video	8/16 hours	Yes	None
Sony SLV-3000	Sony (Australia) Pty Ltd	Japan	1200-1300	N, 5, 8, 11	Betamax	8/16 hours	Yes	Yes
Video Electronics	Video Electronics Pty Ltd	Japan	1200-1400	N, 5, 8, 11	VHS	8/16 hours	Yes	Yes

*RRP is CHOICE's assessment of the recommended retail price. **Suggested retail price at time of buying.

CHOICE, July 1979 — 33

CHOICE tested a range of VCRs, including models from Sony, Philips and National/ Panasonic, predicting trouble ahead over tape formats

After 50 years, your CHOICE has never been greater.

CHOICE Magazine
Authoritative, independent and expert advice on products, services and consumer rights.

CHOICE Online
Readily accessible information assisting consumers in making informed decisions.

CHOICE Shopper
Free member service researching the best price on products valued over $100.

CHOICE Computer
Information and education concerning the ever-changing aspects of technology.

CHOICE Books
Wide selection of books ranging from finance, food, health, computers and more.

CHOICE Advocacy
Championing consumer rights and lobbying government and industry for a better deal.

CHOICE Health Reader
Regular reporting of the latest developments in medicine, nutrition, exercise, etc.

CHOICE Test Research
Independent testing for government, industry and other regulatory authorities.

choice **Make the right one.**

www.choice.com.au

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50 years

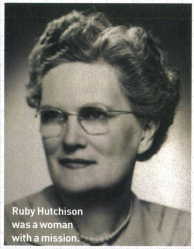
1960 – 2010

Join us on a nostalgic journey as we recall 50 years of testing, advocacy and the major milestones in Australian consumer history.

STORY CHRIS PEARSON
RESEARCH ALAN DOOLEY

Ruby Hutchison and Roland Thorp: CHOICE founders

Widowed at age 30 with seven children, Ruby Hutchison knew how easy it was to be ripped off. As the first female member of WA parliament's upper house, she was constantly receiving complaints about shonky household goods. Ruby decided to set up a consumer organisation – independent, not-for-profit and non-political. In 1959 Ruby met Roland Thorp, Professor of Pharmacology at University of Sydney. From very different backgrounds they had a shared aim, and CHOICE was born.



Ruby Hutchison was a woman with a mission.

1960
CHOICE is chosen

Over cups of tea, the Australasian Consumers' Association began in the Coogee sunroom of Ruby's daughter, Ivy-May Sheahan. ACA needed a journal – 'Cash and Care' and 'Consumer Goods and Not so Goods!' were names bandied about, but *CHOICE* won out. About 20,000 copies were printed, four issues in the first year. In the launch issue, a woman photographed peering in a freezer complained she hadn't given permission to appear. We appeased her with a free year's subscription (then a hefty £1).

We tested "slimming cures" (we gave Turkish baths and corsets the thumbs down) and aspirin in Roland Thorp's lab. However, ACA was running lean – we had £50 in the kitty.

A universal theme emerged – comparison of groceries with unit pricing (50 years on, this is legislated, partly thanks to us).

Membership stood at 7500.

1961
Puff – the magic draggin'

In our "biggest project yet", we tested cigarettes for nicotine and tar levels on our special "smoking machine", which puffed away for months. We cautiously concluded "studies tended to emphasise a connection between excessive smoking and arteriosclerosis and pulmonary emphysema". On the subject of lung cancer? We said: "Time alone will show whether there really is a risk between the two occurrences." But we did reassure ACA's more macho members that smoking seemed to have little effect on virility.

We got in a lather over detergents. "A bewildering array of value-for-money options ('save 2/11', 'great free gift') confronts the housewife whenever she shops." We concluded that "it's pointless to evaluate which detergent gives best value for money, since prices are arbitrary and change from week to week."

Transistor radios went on test – but which from the mind-boggling array of 80 models available? Similarly, ballpoint pens were brand new and we scribbled away, putting them through their paces.

Membership passed 20,000. "Official bodies and manufacturers are taking notice of our tests and even consulting us from time to time," *CHOICE* enthused.

1962
To UV or not UV?

"Look how fit he is; he's as brown as a berry" – ACA debunked the link between a good tan and good health as we slip-slapped suntan lotions: "None make you tan; they only slow down burning, so you can tan less painfully." However, we did suggest "too much exposure to UV rays can have harmful effects and produce conditions that may lead to skin cancer."

ACA received many enquiries about goods with tricky guarantees, particularly electrical appliances. Our advice? "Your primary contract is with the shopkeeper and your legal rights are with him ... you will be best advised to make your purchases from stores of good repute."

We made submissions to the Packaged Goods Inquiry. Packages are "the silent salesman", we declared, "but too many are deceptive and misleading, and do not give us the information we want".

On a membership roll, we proclaimed we wanted a market where "Best Buys replace best-sellers".

Six issues a year of *CHOICE* now.

1963
All the mod cons ...

We continued our campaign against dodgy packaging, with a celebrity on our side: "Mr. Kennedy, president of the USA, believes consumer protection is a first order of national community business. So does ACA, and we have urged for the setting up of the Australian Packaging Board."

Our lifejacket test left us with a sinking feeling – we could only recommend one out of 36. We also tested rifle cartridges, "because .22 calibre rifle ammunition is very popular for light sporting use". We measured for accuracy, velocity and the amount of powder each contained.

Australians embraced technology – at a cost. A TV was the equivalent of $160 – 10 weeks' salary for a secretary.

CHOICE promoted family planning: "The pill, one of the most effective means of birth control, is now available on the prescription of a doctor."

But Women's Lib was but a dream, as our washing machine test revealed. "A fully automatic washing machine represents the most advanced device available to the housewife to lessen her daily labours." In 1960, 31,000 machines were sold; in 1962, sales rocketed to 65,000. We tested stockings, "a maiden's dream", rating them on cost per hour – expensive lasted about 80 hours, cheapies 45.

"The mail pours in," said our May cover. "1000 new subscribers join ACA every week."

We chimed on about "tasteless meals for a high price" in the UK.

ISTOCK PHOTO

1964
Blasts from the past

CHOICE is read by 500,000, but popularity had a downside. We hit out at manufacturers using 'CHOICE', 'consumer' or 'Best Buy' recommendations to tout their products.

Mushrooms on the menu took on a new meaning when we assessed fallout from atomic testing at Maralinga. ACA measured Caesium 137 and Strontium 90 in food and milk. "Australians are relatively well-off as regards radioactivity in the diet," we said and advised against altering eating patterns – missing out on vital nutrients could be more harmful than any fallout.

We served up hock, chablis, burgundy, riesling and claret to a tasting panel, concluding the 'variety' gave no indication of what the bottle contains!

1965
A Falcon falsehood

Student slide rules slid back and forth 10,000 times in a special machine for our slide rule test. And we didn't miss a chance to make a point: "In this day and age, the housewife needs a slide rule to calculate whether 3/4oz at 1/6d is a better buy than 9oz at 2/11."

We lashed out at misleading ads. Ford claimed its Falcon "completes 70,000 miles in 8 3/4 days. No car has ever travelled so far, so fast, as the stock-model Falcons." In fact, five Falcons covered 14,000 miles each, "just running-in distance," we said.

"Cinderella-like lotions to erase lines are of great interest to most women," *CHOICE* wrote. Magic Secret wrinkle lotion was matched against an egg white. "Both may smooth out wrinkles, but the effect is likely to be slight and unlikely to last long."

In a food mixer test, we proclaimed: "For thousands of years, housewives have been preparing delectable dishes to tempt their husbands, all without machines. But this is the machine age, and the kitchen has not escaped mechanisation.

"The food mixer is a machine that 10 years ago was a rarity but today is regarded as one of the first buys for newlyweds."

1966
On your way, sport!

For the nation's many home dressmakers, we put pins through their paces: "Such a little thing," we said. "But then, how useful – and not so very cheap when the prices are examined."

A member raised this problem: "It's unfair for a housewife to engage in a battle of wits with a salesman, as the latter has the training to ensure a sale." His suggestion? A form saying purchases are made by family discussion. "As soon as the housewife sees the caller is a salesman, she hands him a Notice to Hawkers." At the bottom, it says, in plain Australian, "be on your way, sport."

"Nothing will grow on you but the flavour," stated Slenderella, a low-calorie soft drink. "What a temptation for dieters," we commented. Such a large range of low-calorie soft drinks ...

We called for standardised food purity laws. NSW required 3.2% buttermilk in milk, while Victoria required 3.5%, a difference of nearly 10%.

"After all the excitement of the parting of the streamers on the docks, you are on you way ..." So began *CHOICE*'s pre-jet age report on visiting Britain, where "even the 'best' restaurants can serve a completely tasteless meal for a high price".

1967
Holden vs Ford

A whole issue was devoted to the great Holden vs Ford debate. Our sister association, British Consumers' Association, put each through their paces. "If you do a lot of long distance driving, the Falcon was the better bet – its comfort and handling were better than those of the Holden." The story brought us thousands of new members, but existing members were furious because they had heard about the test in the media before they read about it in their own magazine.

We fought our own war over the Agent Zero M Sonic Blaster toy, which resembled a bazooka. Our lab tests showed it emitted 140 decibels. "Repeated firing would be very likely to cause damage to the child's ear."

Our 11-page report, "Flammable Night Wear for Children," lobbied to force manufacturers to label clothing, especially children's night wear.

The Brits bravely suggested the contemporary Falcon was a better car than the Holden.

1968
A place in the sun

Tanning got another whipping: "A good suntan is the done thing," we said. "Skin cancer is an occupational hazard for the sailor, rural worker and others who must expose themselves to the sun all day, year in, year out."

We changed our minds on the electric toothbrush. "It is not as foolish a gadget as it might first seem to be," we said, arguing it was handy for "invalids" and children, encouraging them to clean their teeth.

ACA called for a vaccination program to stamp out measles, a disease striking 100,000 children every year. "The money must be found," we said. And toddlers were contracting lead poisoning from eating flakes of paint. *CHOICE* called for legislation to restrict lead in paint to less than one per cent.

The conference of the International Organization of Consumers Unions took place in the US. Privileged ACA delegates visited the White House as the guests of Mrs. Lyndon Johnson.

1969
Boos for booze

Compulsory breath testing was introduced. We concluded the DIY Breathmeter was fiddly to use and expensive, so we advised readers against buying one.

Wear-once paper panties were put through their paces ("fashion's folly?" we asked). Suitable for travellers, but pricewise no substitute for "prettily trimmed" nylon or cotton equivalent was the verdict.

Consumer credit became available and in demand. "It's shrouded in mystery, with the cost of credit expressed in bewildering terms."

ACA turned 10, but forwent the champers. "Many think it's something to celebrate, but we wish we didn't need to be here at all," we said soberly.

1970
Bewildered women

ACA enlightened confused women on the differences between pantyhose denier, gauge and weave. "Today's answer to the needs of the miniskirt and greater body freedom comes in a bewildering array of sizes, types and styles."

We tested portable cassette recorders: "they eliminate the time-consuming and frustrating business of threading tape – you just snap in the cartridge."

Food labelling went under the microscope. "Regulations do not give the consumer information about the food she buys," we wrote. "When she cannot examine the contents, all the necessary information should appear on the label."

"The Pill – do its benefits outweigh its hazards?" We asked in a report sizing up the overseas research. Our advice to members? Minimise the hazards by having a check-up every six to 12 months, including a Pap smear, breast examination and blood pressure measurement.

1971
Scotch or Australian?

Car headrests were new – they minimised whiplash, but could they also encourage a snooze at the wheel? "They can reduce driving fatigue on long journeys if comfortably adjusted."

On doorstep salesmen: "A man's home is his castle, but he needs a moat and portcullis to protect himself from the uninvited persuasive pitches of aggressive doorstep salesmen."

"Whisky – is it Scotch or Australian?" We taste-tested eight top-selling Scottish and local products and asked a panel to tell the difference. "Despite the conditioning that the only whisky is Scotch, some Australian whiskies tasted better than imagined and some Scotch whiskies worse."

Plastic lavatory seats came under our eagle eye, with 13 brands tested for strength and durability, and ease of cleaning and installation. We argued the virtues of a semi-rigid vs rigid plastic seat.

1972
A runway rip-off?

We bemoaned the fact that 2000 air miles from Darwin to Singapore cost $185, while 7000 miles from Singapore to London cost as little as $145. "With Qantas' proposed airfare of $700 return, we look forward to the establishment of honest, realistic prices for air travel."

We devoted half our September issue to gas stoves – no knob was left unturned. And 23 pages of January peered into freezers.

ACA sounded the alarm bells on advertising in children's TV programs. "These days," we declared, "children can sing the advertising jingles on radio and television long before they learn in school that two plus two equals four."

Packaged cheesecakes succumbed to "tempting tests". "The housewife who is short of time and doesn't mind paying extra for convenience may be interested in serving a frozen cheesecake." Our recommended cake "was the panel's out-and-out favourite and nutritionally good, as well". Never mind the fat content.

And, aiming to reduce our waistlines, we donned sauna shorts, some of which were inflatable. We had "amazing results" in terms of weight loss, but concluded it was water, not fat, that was shed.

1973
First green tips

"The ever-increasing costs of a bottle of beer, combined with the never-decreasing thirst of Australians, has revived interest in home brewing." So we brewed up a storm of our own, using our very own recipe and separately bought (not kit) ingredients. "Our beer was clear, had a good head and was rated highly," we boasted.

Green themes revealed some early shoots. "The ecologically concerned consumer is emerging, who considers value for money and the cost to the environment before he buys ... Like charity, responsibility for the future of our environment begins at home."

The Bleeper Electronic Golf Ball Set, which helped you locate lost balls, belonged in the rough, as far as we were concerned. Instead of paying a hefty $22 for the transmitter (in the ball) and receiver, you'd be better off buying regular balls at $1 each, we suggested.

ACA made its first submission to federal parliament for a National Commission for Consumer Affairs to coordinate consumer issues.

1974
Crocks of the matter

We were on a roll, with about 130,000 members and rising ... "Subscription and mailing procedures are so large that computer services are necessary." And rising wages, postage and printing costs prompted subscriptions to rocket from $5 to $10.

We evaluated touch-typing courses. "If you take a night course, you should be typing 45-50 words per minute by the end of the year." We also suggested mastering typewriter maintenance.

"Grow amazing live sea monkeys," said the ads. "Just add water!" We exposed the ruse: they were actually brine shrimp eggs, for years raised as food for tropical fish.

DIY was all the rage. We tested heavy-duty electric drills costing $50, and put portable electric circular saws through their paces.

The Crock-Pot made its debut – and so, too, did the working wife. "It must be classified as a non-essential appliance because most people already have an adequate oven, but it might be useful for a working couple, as meals can be left in reasonable safety to cook all day."

ISTOCK PHOTO

1975
Costly colour

Colour TV flickered into life: "The most complicated piece of equipment in the household," we said, so little wonder the sets carried a daunting $900 price tag. Meanwhile, sales of the electronic calculator had "skyrocketed" due to a drop in prices.

We trumpeted the virtues of the *Trade Practices Act 1974*. "One of the most important pieces of legislation for consumers in Australia ... to control restrictive trade practices and monopolisation and protect from unfair commercial practices."

We got merry testing gins: "If you're adding a mixer, go for the cheapest; differences in expensive gins will not be noticeable."

Recommended Daily Allowances (RDA) food labels were on the table. We advised against them.

1977
The campaign trail

Moving with the times, we argued that, in de facto relationships, the parties were in a less advantageous position than their married counterparts.

Technology was on the march. First up, we were ho-hum over digital watches. "They've burst on the scene ... digital watches are an acquired taste." And microwave ovens were put to the test, as "the number used in the home has been rising rapidly".

We also turned up the volume on AM/FM cassette recorders. "You'd think Australians want nothing but cassette recorders. There are rows of them with the fashionable military look."

Still in warrior mode, we tested 15 tomahawks, conceding "most are not manufactured with safety in mind".

CHOICE called for goods containing asbestos to carry warnings of the dangers of even minimal handling.

1976
Gristle for the mill

"The great Australian meat pie is dead," we declared, "replaced by the great Australian gravy pie." ACA surveyed meat pies from all around Australia and, very sad to say, we had difficulty finding any meat in them.

Our June editorial explained how "computerised checkout systems in supermarkets may become commonplace within the next few years." We warned of "a new supermarket rip-off", because this technology made it easy for supermarkets to flog old stock at new prices.

We spoke out against "more than a million tonnes of waste packaging per year", urging readers to reject overpackaged goods, buy products with reusable packages and use their own bags to cut down on plastic bags.

Always keen to cater to rural readers, we put barbed wire to the test, comparing 17 products for barbs, galvanising and cost, concluding thin is best.

1978
Mincing, mixing and multi-purpose

"Because of ACA, we have a *Trade Practices Act*," we said, referring consumer complaints elsewhere so we could "concentrate on testing and reporting".

The first tests for the year were certainly not glamorous: chemical toilets and compost bins, together with hints on how to make good compost.

Pocket cameras were taking the market by storm. We didn't question their convenience, merely their image-taking, finding they weren't up to 35mm.

We minced, chopped, grated, whipped and pureed as we explored the virtues of a new appliance, the multi-purpose kitchen machine (aka 'food processor'). We found it did the lot and more besides, without lots of clumsy attachments.

And we took the Big Three cars for a spin: Holden, Falcon and Valiant. While originally aiming to test just fuel consumption, we went along for the ride, evaluating everything from handbrake performance to heater controls.

We sent out a call to members, asking them to complete the Reliability and Servicing Survey, covering washing machines, refrigerators, dishwashers and deep freezers. "We need information from everybody, regardless of how reliable or unreliable their major household appliances have been," we urged.

Going green was picking up momentum. "The world's fossil fuels are being consumed at an ever-increasing rate and will be exhausted." So began our report on solar water heating for the pool and home.

1979
Cereal offender

It was crunch time as a favourite of ours, breakfast cereals, had their first outing – and one had 52.2% sugar! "Who would guess the family breakfast table is responsible for more dental cavities than you can point a sticky finger at?"

Bankcard had billings of $1222m in 1978, so we examined plastic money, "a 20th-century phenomenon". "There are about two million regular credit card users and by this time next year, there will be a further 500,000."

We tested video games: "Electronic games, first offered to patrons of penny arcades, are now in a domestic package that simply connects to your TV antenna socket."

In our "Novice Gardener's Guide to Buying Indoor Plants", we gave the green light to kentia palms, maidenhair ferns and philodendrons as the means to "add colour, beauty and variety to your home".

With the return economy airfare to London a hefty $1880, most people kept their feet on the ground. Fares were set by IATA (International Air Transport Association) or between governments. "Once fares have been approved, different fares are illegal," we advised readers.

1980
Age of anxiety

CHOICE sounded an ominous note in its in-depth report, "Unemployment: A Survival Guide For Your Daughter, Your Son ... Or Yourself." As a further sign of troubled times, we featured "Elusive Sleep: What To Do About Insomnia."

"Is marriage going out of fashion?" we asked. "While costs have escalated, tradition has remained the same – it's the bride's day and her parents must pay ... A case of here comes the bride, and there goes $12,000."

ACA got its skates on: "In the US, the roller-skating craze has reached such proportions that it has glossy magazines. Australia is heading into a similar boom. Rinks have multiplied from a handful to well over a hundred."

We surveyed supermarket prices. "You may be able to save up to 20% at the checkout. We surveyed prices at 66 supermarkets around Australia ... we hope this will be an annual survey of grocery prices in Australian supermarkets." In a comparison between regions, Sydney supermarkets emerged the cheapest.

First-home buyers were finding it tough. "This was particularly true in Sydney last year when middle-income homes were rising by $1000 a month," we wrote in a special two-part report.

1981
There's gold in them thar hills ...

"Should you buy a metal detector?" we asked. "With gold fetching hundreds of dollars an ounce and some recent fabulous finds, people are heading for the hills in the hope of finding a fortune."

About 3000 households outlined their experiences with washing machines, dishwashers, colour TV sets and washing machines in our reliability survey. "You responded magnificently," we wrote.

"Do you get your kilo of flesh when you buy a whole lamb, hindquarter of beef or side of pork?" Our story came complete with handy diagrams of lamb, beef and pig carcasses and how to slice them up.

Price-checkers visited 92 supermarkets in all capital and eight provincial cities. Sydney was the cheapest, with Brisbane running second. Woolies got the nod as the cheapest chain in Melbourne.

CHOICE prophesied: "Soon you will call up retailers' price lists on your home computer, select the items you want and key them into the terminal. The computer will do the rest – arrange delivery from automated warehouses, credit the cost of your purchases and debit it from your bank account ..."

We gave the current craze, the water bed, a miss. "Though the spirit was willing, CHOICE didn't test the optimistically named Don Juan water beds, as our tests wouldn't allow fair comparisons."

1982
Our condoms are a flop

ACA sounded a warning over Bankcard allowing consumers to order goods by phone. "As a generous gesture, the bank will 'consider' refunding what they charge you for bills run up by someone illegally using your Bankcard number," we reported.

We added some culture to the magazine, with our first report on the new miracle food, yoghurt – "claimed to cure just about everything from baldness to radioactive fallout". In 1980, yoghurt sales reached $40 million, an increase of 20% over the previous year.

We tested bottled water, concluding "your own tap water may be better value than an expensive imported mineral water, both for taste and mineral content". Sales of these "effervescents" (most from France) were increasing 25% a year. "ACA welcomes water's sparkling new image and agrees it's sophisticated and sensible to serve ... but we don't see why you have to pay $1.90/L for water that isn't necessarily better than tap water and may be less healthy."

Condoms were put through their paces – using, we reassured our readers, laboratory methods – with disturbing results in leakage and bursting that could lead to unwanted pregnancy and disease transmission.

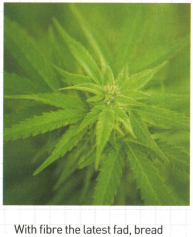
ISTOCK PHOTO

1983
The stoned age

CHOICE went radical by claiming "possession and cultivation of marijuana for personal use should not be an offence." We shared: "Smoking cannabis is a much more effective way of getting stoned than eating it."

"Privacy: in a microfiche bowl. Your name is in the computer. How much do they know? What are they saying about you?" With 1984 round the corner, we listed organisations likely to have personal details on file and pushed for greater controls on the use of this information.

In buying a home computer, *CHOICE* helped its readers to "make sense of these mysterious black boxes" and "decide if you need one at all". Our advice: "Stick to the cheap end of the market until you're sure you really need 64K RAM, high-resolution colour graphics, twin-disc drives and a printer. It will also cost you a lot less if you discover you're just not ready for the computer age."



With fibre the latest fad, bread came up for scrutiny in an age where "the clip-clop of the baker's cart and fresh-that-morning crusty loaves have receded forever into the past."

"Which VCR? – at last the test you've been waiting for," we proclaimed as we earnestly embraced the modern age.

We also asked, "are low- and no-alcohol drinks drinkable?" And the good news was that our panel generally could not tell the difference.

In October, we moved from Chippendale, NSW, to Marrickville.

1984
Crunch time

"We will have basic medical and hospital cover under a national health insurance scheme called Medicare." *CHOICE* outlined what readers would pay – and get for their money.

Once again, we chomped away at cereals: "What's for breakfast – is the cardboard box more nutritious than the cereal it holds?" All-Bran, Weeties, Vita Brits and Weet-Bix got gold stars, while muesli was still a very small part of a diverse market.

Our fifth supermarket survey found price differences of 79% between two Sydney supermarkets in the "cheapest available" basket.

As part of Australia's two-airline (TAA and Ansett) policy, fares were determined by the Independent Airfares committee. Why, we asked, is a return airfare to Fiji half the price of Sydney-Perth return? But, after a little number crunching, we discovered domestic airfares weren't too exxy after all.

1985
Gobbledegook Award

Our very first Gobbledegook Award winner was a mortgage document from a building society, with one offending clause in particular. A spokesperson defended the verbiage, but we were not confident a typical reader would have "the capacity, necessary knowledge and time to spend deciphering the clause".

We tested CD players, "the biggest leap in sound recording technology since the Edison cylinder". Such progress didn't come cheap, but we offered comfort that CDs were likely to become cheaper over time. Performance results for every CD player tested were "excellent and better than most turntables in a similar price range". So many players were flooding the market that we had to run a further test six months later.

"Food radiation arouses fears and moves are afoot to introduce the process in Australia – 10 times the amount of radiation proposed in the US." We concluded irradiation should not be permitted without stringent safeguards.

"Tearing your hair out trying to find a cure for thinning hair?" we asked, concluding there were only two solutions for follicly challenged men: castration or choosing ancestors that kept their crowning glory into old age. Embrace your baldness, we suggested, using an image of a young and gyrating Peter Garrett to argue the case.

1986
In lofty company

An issue of *CHOICE* went on display at the Powerhouse Museum beside the Bible and the Koran as part of the 'Making Sense of the World' exhibition. "*CHOICE* is an example of the means by which people can order their information and make more informed decisions," said the exhibition's curator.

Baby bottle teats went under the microscope: "We found unacceptable levels of potent carcinogens in many." Nitrosamines were the offending substances – several countries limited levels of these, but not Australia.

We compared local "champagnes" and the French originals. "Untutored palates can't tell between the real thing and the local version," we said.

ISTOCK PHOTO

1987
Aussie, Aussie ...

"Should you buy Australian?" we asked as the Australian Made campaign gathered momentum. There was little need to buy food from overseas, but car buyers were in a bind. "If you want reliability, go for imports; if the budget's tight, go for local," we advised.

"The ice age has arrived," *CHOICE* told its readers. Aussie consumption of ready-made frozen meals had risen by over 50%, with 'classic', 'authentic' and 'cuisine' bandied about to lift their status. However, our test found that only a handful gave you a balanced feed.

After Chernobyl, we tested European processed foods for radiation. Only three of the food samples had detectable levels of Caesium-137, which, it seems, was definitely from Chernobyl a– a Bulgarian strawberry jam, some Turkish figs and Yugoslavian cherries. But we warned the threat of contamination would remain a problem for many years to come.

Our new quarterly magazine, *Consuming Interest*, looked at consumer policies, advertising, health standards, legislation and hazards of all kinds. It cost just $17 for individuals.

1988
Bring on the bling

In line with the glitzy '80s, our cover was about buying and insuring jewellery and how to clean newly bought booty.

Smokers' and non-smokers' rights were becoming a hazy area. "A small but growing number of restaurants are totally smoke-free, and an even larger number provide separate areas or smoke-free periods."

We tried to scuttle bank fees, arguing that small account holders carry an unfair share of the costs. "Any costs to the bank should be reflected in the interest rate and not passed on to the customer in separate charges."

With almost half of all Australians taking vitamin supplements, we revealed many were exceeding their RDI.

We took a moral tone on cordless phones – "synonymous with trendiness, self-indulgence and, dare we say it, laziness?" – but suggested that the elderly, gardeners and owners of multi-storey homes would appreciate them.

1989
Live, invest, die

"Shoulder pads are a nightmare for dry cleaners and most are awaiting the demise of the fashion," we said. "It's a pity more manufacturers don't adopt the practice of attaching shoulder pads with Velcro strips, making them easy to remove before dry cleaning the garment."

"Live, invest, die – Yuppie epitaph, 1988." So began a report on investment options - buying shares, superannuation and investment options. In April, it was taxation's turn: "It's a sign of the times when taxation becomes a common subject for party chat."

Our report on shower roses raised environmental issues such as energy and water conservation, and we advised readers on how to make savings and cope with rationed water supplies. We gave our pick of "energy-efficient shower roses which give a fair to good shower".

Pasta sauces were tested exhaustively. "Ten years ago, the average family ate home-cooked pasta once a week; now it's more likely to feature two to three times."

1990
Not Kerry or Rupert

We turned 30, and our staff of 80 posed for a group photo in the magazine, bar one – our anonymous buyer who didn't want to blow her cover.

DIY was the rage in all areas of life: "Untie the knot without tying yourself up: DIY divorce – no custody battles or property settlements; there's a lot to be said for it."

CHOICE surveyed supermarket policies and found some "trailblazers" were encouraging suppliers to use recyclable packages. "The buying habits of 'green' consumers will be the most important influence on the products that supermarkets stock."

Still in the aisles, unit pricing re-emerged: "It's the simple remedy to this tangle of package sizes and the problems of cost comparison."

"What a blast!" we declared, as we tested ghettoblasters or 'boom boxes', illustrating the story with "members of the rap music set" writhing away.

"Do your bit to control the greenhouse effect or protect your household budget. Saving energy around the home is easy; it can be achieved without sacrificing creature comforts," we reassured readers.

We also urged them to take out gift subscriptions. "CHOICE guards its independence by accepting no advertising. CHOICE is supported almost entirely by your subscriptions; it's yours collectively, and not a money-spinner for the likes of Kerry Packer or Rupert Murdoch."

1991 – 1998

1991
War on waists

The fight on fat gained momentum. "The blossoming of mono- and polyunsaturated oils, margarines and other products bearing 'lite', 'less fat' and 'no-cholesterol' labels hasn't dented our appetite for fat," *CHOICE* declared. "The way ahead is signposted with even more 'less fat' products and fat substitutes."

There were no such labels on the boxed chocolates we put to the taste test, comparing local and imported products. "Paul Keating may despair, but European chocolates won hands down – smooth and not as sweet as Australian chocolates."

The growing use of water filters prompted us to test town water for nasties. "Our results suggest our water is in better health than some might expect," we said, with no pesticides and minimal heavy metals.

Ten staff took our car, bike, bus and train Commuter Challenge from the North Shore in Sydney to our offices across the city. The train won. Our report railed against Australia's "car-dependent city planning".

1992
Wasser difference?

Yes, this was the headline for our report on non-carbonated bottled waters. We asked the Trade Practices Commission to investigate misleading health claims made by suppliers of bottled water.

"A brave new venture is coming to fruition," announced managing editor Cathy Gray. "For the first time, *CHOICE* will have a newsagency presence in NSW communities from Bondi to Broken Hill." The plan was to run the scheme out nationally.

Change was afoot in other ways. Because ACA was often confused with TV's *A Current Affair*, we began calling ourselves the Consumers' Association in common usage.

Communications technology, too, was on the move. In "The Full Fax", we tested 10 models under $1200. "For people working from home, faxes have made a revolutionary improvement in the way they do business. Others have found the technology useful for social communication." And mobiles: "Not just a yuppie toy but an indispensable tool of the trade for people whose job requires mobility." We conducted our first test of cellphones, with "bulky" a frequent gripe. Little wonder, when one weighed 670g and was 20cm long!

1993
All the right signals

Optus arrived to shake up Telecom's monopoly. Other changes included being able to buy your own phone, flexi-plans and lower STD and IDD prices.

Credit card fees were mooted. We argued consumers would be worse off – lower interest rates wouldn't offset fees. "Despite our opposition, card issuers will soon be allowed to introduce fees for credit cards," we lamented.

"Who would have thought it?", we said, not easily surprised. *CHOICE* reported one in four beers sold in Australia was light-alcohol, a doubling over five years. We concluded the new-generation light beers, which were bitter and dark, were more palatable than earlier offerings.

And on the subject of vices, we revisited cigarettes, citing overseas studies that showed smokers of low-tar cigarettes compensated by drawing in more forcibly or taking more frequent puffs.

Alternative medicines were giving the more traditional medicines a run for their money. "In the US, in 1990, more visits were made to alternative therapists than to medical doctors ... some people think it's quackery, but a sizable and growing number are turning to alternative medicines for health care."

1994
Warm fuzzies

"If you buy Australian, don't assume Australian icons are made or owned here," we warned, urging readers to buy only those local products that were competitive or superior in price, quality or durability to imported or foreign-owned brands. Meanwhile, our car reliability survey showed an improvement since the previous survey, with the biggest improvement in the local offerings.

Where's the smart money now, we asked? In shares. "Because property is stagnant and interest rates on cash deposits are very low. If you have money to invest, only shares have the potential for significant growth." The banks were not doing themselves any favours: "The Big Four are not delivering satisfactory customer service ... they need to take a good hard look at their practices."

Fast food companies sponsoring school activities? *CHOICE* said forget warm, fuzzy feelings: "We must not be naïve about companies' motives."

1995
Four chambers, one bullet

"We'd like to think Australians are making healthier choices at the supermarket," we wrote, but an analysis revealed Aussies were spending most of their money on cigarettes and soft drinks. Coke, Arnott's biscuits, Longbeach and Winfield cigarettes topped the list.

We looked at "the financial advice game – four chambers, one bullet". A few guinea pigs "found excellence; most found mediocrity and quite a few found trouble." Some plans were "disturbing" and could even result in breaking the law.

On Australia Day, Pay TV, marketed as the "home entertainment revolution", was launched. Galaxy kicked off with its 24-hour sports network, as Foxtel and Optusvision prepared to enter the market.

On a technological roll, we touted the Internet "as the next big thing." But we warned: "It takes most people a while to learn how to use it effectively ... (and) while there's a lot of useful information ... there's also a lot of unreliable and unchecked information."

For our 35th birthday, we found the oldest *CHOICE*-recommended appliance still in daily use – Evelyn Yates' Sunbeam Electric Automatic Frypan with original glass lid. It got the tick from us in August 1960.

ISTOCK PHOTO

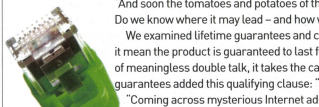
1996
Caught up in the 'mysterious Internet'

We predicted the cashless society. "Hate filling your pockets with small change? You'll love the convenience of a smart card ... Here's the rundown on the new form of money that's just around the corner." Just like a phone card, we told readers, the stored-value cards could be linked to your bank account and topped up at an ATM or EFTPOS outlet.

"Genetic engineering is already being used to process our food," ACA warned. "And soon the tomatoes and potatoes of the future could be hitting our tables. Do we know where it may lead – and how will we know what we're buying?"

We examined lifetime guarantees and concluded they are meaningless. "Does it mean the product is guaranteed to last for ... as long as it lasts?" "For a piece of meaningless double talk, it takes the cake," added a subscriber. And some guarantees added this qualifying clause: "as long as it is used appropriately".

"Coming across mysterious Internet addresses like ausconsumer@choice.com.au? If you're feeling left out, it's time to get 'connected'," we advised. In September, we launched *Computer CHOICE* magazine, the technology sibling of *CHOICE*, published quarterly, subscription $32.



1997
Front-row seat

"It's new, it sounds exciting and it's very confusing – it's home theatre." We gave readers a sneak preview of something so new it wasn't yet on sale – the digital video disc (DVD). "Even if the system finally comes onto the market, it will take years until it grows to similar prominence to videos today," *CHOICE* prophesied.

The Heart Foundation's Pick the Tick program got much less than a wholehearted tick from us. Manufacturers had to pay between $2000 and $50,000 a year to use it (depending on the product's yearly sales), so not all products eligible to carry the tick could do so.

We raised the alarm over 'gene beans' – genetically engineered soybeans that the food industry was importing to place in a huge array of processed foods, without telling consumers. *CHOICE* called for clear labelling of the products affected, from breads to ice creams.

We enlightened readers on the ins and outs of the GST, concluding older and poorer people will be likely to be worse off with a combo of GST and income tax cuts. "Unless you compensate a large number of Australians for the extra tax burden, it's unfair to impose a GST."

"Chardonnay: wine of the '90s. Chardonnay has come out of nowhere to seize an extraordinary 37% of the white wine market. It may be everyone's favourite blonde, but how good is it really, given its often high price?" We got merry tasting 89 chardonnays.

1998
Computer says...

Some things never change. About 7500 subscribers filled in our bank questionnaire and some wrote us a letter, too. "This is a record and shows what a hot issue banking is."

In June, we launched www.choice.com.au "for those of you who have access to the Internet. Do you have something to say or a question someone else may have the answer to? Then send a message to our consumer forums."

But our embrace of technology lead to a few hiccups, too. Our new computer system stumped subscribers when we mailed out the Jan/Feb issue with 0000 instead of the usual subscription expiry date.

Digital TV was on the horizon. "You can have a great picture on one channel or a bigger choice of TV stations on the same channel. Why didn't anyone ask which we'd prefer?"

We launched a perennial favourite for our readers, The Hard Word, on our back page. It's still there.

1999
Scary times

Food poisoning paranoia prompted a rash of anti-bacterial varieties of cling wraps, soaps, cloths, cleaning liquids, liquid handwash, toothbrushes and even garbage bags! We said it was overkill – washing your hands would do the job just as well.

But one bigger bug was lurking in the background: "Y2K and you. Worried about no money, electricity or phone for a few days? Read on to see what is and isn't likely to happen." We reassured that "though the Millennium Bug may cause minor disruptions, there's no cataclysmic scenario to worry about".

High-tech created other headaches. "We've got email, e-commerce and e-credit. Now we have e-waste. Five million computers and six million mobile phones destined for landfill."

Anti-oxidants and free radicals were the media buzz. "Do pills do the job? We'll hear more hyped-up reports before we have all the answers." We told readers to head off to the fruit and veggie shop for plenty of anti-oxidant-rich foods, rather than the supplement shelf in the health store.

CHOICE annual subscriptions rose to $54 – due, we said, to higher production costs.

E-waste gave the computer trash bin a new meaning.

2000
Tall poppies

Our annual supermarket survey noted Franklins, leader in the price-conscious category since 1994, now had Coles and Woolies hot on its heels. Aldi was also preparing its assault on the Aussie market.

To all the supermarkets, *CHOICE* made yet another heartfelt plea: "Consumers want unit pricing. Your refusal to give it does no good for your image and you appear greedy and unhelpful."

For our male readers, we sized up Viagra as well as propecia for male baldness. We happily revealed another use for Viagra – flowers stand up straight and last a week longer (though we added it would be cheaper to buy new flowers).

The GST is a fact of life, we said. "The most significant transformation of Australia's tax system ever, there are too many unanswered questions." We tried to deliver some answers.

We began our Home Tester panel. More than 1500 people volunteered and the first 300 dipped and sipped their way through 14 brands of teabags to find the best cuppa.

2001
Got the sheets?

In a busy year for ACA, *CHOICE* got a new look, with a new masthead and call-to-action slogan, "Independent Information for Smart Consumers".

We introduced CHOICE Shopper, a free service where you tell us the product you want to buy and price you want to beat. Products covered include electrical appliances, cameras, printers and computers.

Computer CHOICE tested digital cameras for the first time, finding all produced images as sharp or even sharper than a compact camera (and we're talking resolutions of 1.9-4.3 megapixels here).

Because more than 80% of consumers thought it was important to buy Australian, we explained the difference between Australian-made and Australian-owned.

We got to the bottom of things in our report on toilet papers, titled "Got the Sheets?" It was not good news for the greenies among us: users panned the recycled and bleached brands, saying they scored well for strength, but were short on smoothness, softness and absorbency.

2002
Going nuts

Our website was going gangbusters, with 90,000 visitors per month.

We hit out at food labels, saying "this product may contain traces of ... nuts and egg" made life more difficult for people with allergies who avoided products they didn't need to.

We had given soft-serve ice cream a licking years before, finding more than half with high levels of bacteria. In true wowser fashion, we warned people off, adding such a poor-quality product is a health hazard. However, our latest test "didn't find any of the nasty bacteria we were looking for".

"A PDA in the hand ... is what? It's a personal digital assistant – gadget or godsend?" We concluded PDAs were useful, but not worth the expense.

And our latest bank survey was again unflattering. Almost all members said a bank account was an essential service, but 69% said banks didn't care about their community obligations and two-thirds thought their bank was concerned with increasing profits. "The bigger the institution, the less you like it: the Big Four are at the bottom of the heap."

iSTOCK PHOTO

2003
Cheap at the price

"We have a very scary article in this issue," we warned readers. Once again, financial planners came under the spotlight. Our survey of plans showed 27% rated poor or very poor, while 24% were just borderline.

Fast food was in the fryer for urging us to upsize. One study found an upsize deal that delivered 50% more fat, calories and sugar for just 16% more money. How's that for value?, we asked.

"Although digital cameras are growing in popularity, non-digital cameras are still worth buying," we advised readers, adding they were often a cheaper upfront purchase and film was a relatively cheap storage medium for images.

2004
Sex sells, as usual ...

Things got steamy within the pages of *CHOICE*. "In a world of sexy products, plasma screens are currently one of the most desirable, but are they worth the high cost?" we asked. "They have great picture quality and their slimline look is very sexy." However, we argued they were expensive and could suffer 'burn-in' and broken pixels.

Members told us their most useful gadgets. Topping the list were electric water filters, hair clippers and rice cookers; bottom were electric massagers, foot spas and facial saunas.

ACA announced the launch of a magazine spin-off, *CHOICE Money & Rights*. "We can 'up the ante' on Australia's lawmakers and financial services providers," we told readers.

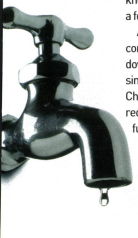
We put the squeeze on child obesity.

2005
Power to the people

Only five out of 10 cots passed our safety tests. "If a cot doesn't pass, it shouldn't be on sale – but this is an improvement on our previous test, when only one out of nine passed."

Also on health and safety, we revealed another unfriendly fat: "Trans fat, hidden in many processed foods, is even worse for your heart than the saturated fat you know about. You can't tell how much is in a food from the label."

A win for consumers – and us – as component pricing got the thumbs down. CHOICE had long called for a single price for goods and services. Changes to the *Trade Practices Act* required businesses to disclose the full, single-figure price. "You've complained long and hard about airlines printing airfares in bits and pieces, with the full price stated nowhere," we told readers.



Is bottled water a triumph of marketing, we asked. "You have a product that is cheap, safe and pleasant to drink: tap water. Along comes bottled water that's no safer, is often indistinguishable from tap water, and costs much more. And we buy it by the millions of litres and dollars per year."

We lamented the deregulated power market. Instead of producing lower prices and better supply, it had done the opposite: SA consumers faced a 30% hike in their bills.

Everyone was cluing up on the internet. We explored the ins and outs of eBay, "an online bazaar that lets you buy and sell all kinds of items. It has millions of satisfied customers, but you need to know the rules to use it wisely." And more than half of all *Computer CHOICE* readers were using broadband, compared to just 16% two years earlier.

2006
Choosing CHOICE

We started calling ourselves, not just the magazine, CHOICE. "Research found CHOICE was well-recognised but the Australian Consumers' Association wasn't and people confused it with government," said then-CEO Peter Kell.

And we shimmied to iPods and MP3 players. "Digital music players have revolutionised the way we listen to music ... holding your whole music collection on a device little bigger than a matchbox may seem strange after the chunky Walkman."

CHOICE sounded the alarm over baby dummies; six failed the standard, which wasn't mandatory.

We also took up the campaign against child obesity, which had reached epidemic proportions. About 70% of parents *CHOICE* surveyed thought the government should regulate food and drink marketing to children.

Our shadow shoppers sharpened their talons by visiting nail salons. More than a third were unsatisfactory, with shoddy manicures and sloppy hygiene such as washing hand towels in the foot spa.

Still with our claws out, we unveiled the Shonky Awards – "the top 10 dishonest, unsafe, unethical, mean or downright useless products and services of the past year".

2007 – 2010

2007
Thanks a bundle!

We reported that comparing bundled phone and internet packages was just about impossible because they were so complex. And it wasn't just us – PhoneChoice, a comparison website, told *CHOICE* that not even quantitative analysis and computer modelling could successfully unravel and compare bundled packages.

Another plea for unit pricing: "If shops displayed a unit price, shoppers would be in a much better position to judge value." It was mandatory in the EU and widely used in the US, so "why is Australia still behind the times in consumer protection?"

CHOICE chose the web for two new initiatives. First, we launched CHOICE Food for Kids – www.choicefoodforkids.com.au – offering "independent advice about how healthy kids' foods really are".

And campaigning against unfair bank penalty fees, we set up www.fairfees.com.au, in conjunction with Consumer Action Law Centre. The user could send an email to the Treasurer, sharing their stories about unfair fees. More than 1000 people sent an email, while others shared their experiences online.

In October, *CHOICE* launched a consumer news section.

2008
Blokes say no!

"Who eats a healthy diet?" we asked. Analysing the eating patterns of six members, we revealed diets that look good on the surface can have hidden traps – too much sodium and not enough calcium, fibre or water.

With Australia's aging population, we reported on how to improve brain function and help prevent dementia. As far as taking pills went, "if you don't eat fish, supplements may help (for omega-3), but it's not worth spending money on other pills".

Transparency became a buzzword, as we called for hospitals to report publicly on infection rates, adverse events and surgery outcomes.

We hit out at product safety – "a staggering 33% of children's products failed safety standards".

And CHOICE joined forces with the Australian Conservation Foundation and Australian Council of Social Services on the *Energy Efficiency: Preparing Households For Climate Change* report. "Energy-efficient appliances will make cuts in greenhouse gas emissions," we said.

Fifty-seven blokes tested men's moisturisers. We cheekily threw in sorbolene, but our discerning panel gave it the instant thumbs down.

2009
Bearing fruit

CHOICE took over the government's GroceryChoice website. A revised site was to be launched with up-to-date grocery price comparisons . We were bewildered when the government pulled the plug just five days before launch.

CHOICE welcomed ratification of the Kyoto Protocol but criticised the low target of the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme (CPRS). We also pushed for more information on how consumers could lessen their household emissions.

The GFC and plunging share market created opportunities for bargain-hunters. We steered first-time investors through the bewildering array of options – and told those who lost their jobs how they could pay their bills. Later in the year, we looked at investing in gold as a possible port in the storm.

Our longstanding campaign on bank penalty fees bore fruit. NAB scrapped its $30 account overdrawn fee, while Westpac and the Commonwealth Bank reduced their penalty fees and tackled credit card fees.

We called for a mandatory traffic light colour-coding system for all packaged foods. Saturated fat, sodium and sugar would all be rated using these red (high), amber (medium) and green (low) symbols.

Englishman Nick Stace became CEO. CHOICE was already a household name, but Stace's ambition was "to make it essential for every household". Members could ring him personally "to start a conversation about the issues that matter most to you".

2010
CHOICE. Make the right one. Join us as we celebrate 50 amazing years!

Lab test

Home entertainment, whitegoods, household and personal appliances – they're all tested here.

INDUCTION COOKTOPS PAGE 34

Fiona Mair tests induction cooktops in the CHOICE kitchen laboratories.

Inside

37 Fridges

43 Digital radios

Plus

34 Induction cooktops
46 Digital photo frames
48 Air conditioners
51 Four-slice toasters
54 DVRs

CHOICE. Make the right one.

CHOICE has its own testing laboratories, where experienced technical staff put products through their paces. We use test methods from Australian standards, and we develop our own to match the way consumers use a product in their homes. We buy the products we test, to maintain our independence from manufacturers and so we know what you're faced with in the shops. Our recommendations are based on a product's quality and performance, with no hidden bias.

CHOICE SHOPPER For the best deal on products where you see this logo, call 1300 360 655. Have the model name and number, the price you've been quoted and your CHOICE personal subscriber number.

CHOICE ONLINE / CHOICE VIDEO When you see one of these headings, there is more information about this story at **www.choice.com.au**.

CHOICE BEST BUY Our testers award a product a Best Buy if it delivers high quality at a comparatively low price. Not every product test report includes Best Buys.

BEST BUY

CHOICE GREEN BUY Our researchers award a Green Buy to a product that delivers good quality and environmental performance at a comparatively low price. Not every test report has Green Buys.

GREEN BUY

STORY MATTHEW STEEN

Great performance, big costs

Induction is a boon for cooking – but is it worth the expense?

NUTSHELL

>> Seven induction cooktops on test; all score very well.
>> Induction cooktops remain expensive, but are coming down in price.

In our last test of induction cooktops back in 2004, we found they work very well but were prohibitively expensive. This time round, we found they still work very well and are easier to use – but they're still rather expensive compared with electric or gas cooktops. And given the possible added expense of cookware specially designed for induction cooking, are they really worth it?

Induction what?

Induction cooktops work via a magnetic field that essentially turns your cookware into the element by inducing an electric current in the pot or pan, causing it to heat up. As such, food is cooked via the heat of the cookware, not from the cooktop itself. The sales talk highlights their efficiency and energy savings, but when we compared one with a standard ceramic cooktop, there weren't any savings over the same period of time. However, because it boils water in seconds, you may save a little in energy costs by replacing your electric cooktop with an induction, even though the initial purchase price is quite high.

Pros and cons

Induction cooktops convey energy to the cookware faster than any other method of cooking. When you change the temperature, this change is reflected

WHAT TO BUY

93% Omega OI64BB

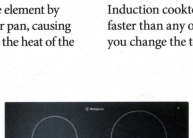
PRICE $1799

GOOD POINTS

- Best overall cooktop on test.
- Excellent cooking performance.
- Control symbols are large and labels are clear.
- No standby costs.

BAD POINTS

- No boost feature.



91% Westinghouse PHN644DU

PRICE $1589

GOOD POINTS

- Excellent cooking performance.
- Control symbols are large and labels are clear.

BAD POINTS

- Highest annual standby cost.

choice shopper

For the best deal, call CHOICE Shopper, 1300 360 655, with the model name and number, the price you want to beat and your CHOICE personal subscriber number. The full range of models on test may not be available in all states.

ABOUT THE REST

Both the **Fisher & Paykel** and **Smeg** cooktops are excellent performers, but are considerably more expensive than the recommended models.

The **Electrolux** is a very good performer overall, but didn't perform as well as most others when cooking rice.

The **Asko** and **Bosch** models are both very good overall, but are let down by their faint labelling and stainless steel strips around their edges that trap dirt.

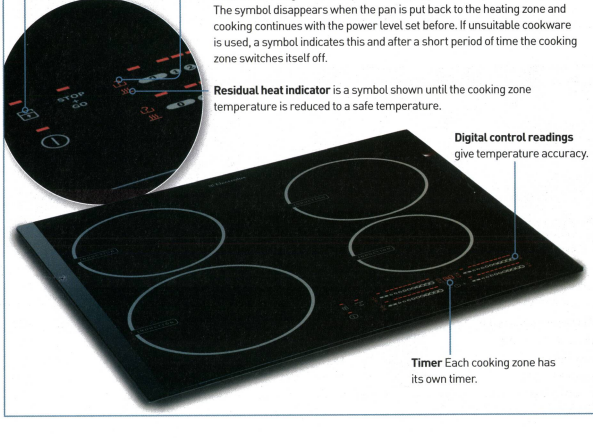
immediately, not gradually as with a radiant ceramic element. Safety is another big pro; since the element itself does not get hot, it's safe to touch unless you've had a hot pan on it for a few minutes. Most have automatic switches that detect when there is nothing on the element and switch off, meaning less energy is wasted from leaving them on.

Induction cooktops may be increasingly worth considering as they come down in price – but you'll need to check all your current cookware is suitable for induction cooking, and buy new cookware if not. Induction cooking requires cookware to have a ferrous bottom so the heat can be conducted rapidly. Take a magnet with you when buying cookware, or look for the "induction suitable" label. Copper, glass, Pyrex and aluminium cookware is unsuitable for an induction cooktop. Significantly curved cookware such as woks won't perform as well because most of >

Induction is a safer type of cooking than gas or electric, as the element itself does not get hot, only the cookware

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Safety sensor monitors the temperature of the bottom of the cookware should an empty pan be left on a cooking zone that is on. It adjusts the power output to avoid damage to the cookware or hob.
Automatic time limit The hob switches off automatically after a pre-defined time if not in use.
Booster The cooking zone will heat up food or liquid quickly at the highest setting, then automatically reduce the heat to a pre-selected lower setting. All models on test except the Omega have a booster.
Protection against overflows The hob may shut down and a beep may sound should overflow spill onto the buttons. Clean the hob or remove the overflow, then begin cooking again.
Power management divides the power between two cooking zones in a pair. The power function increases the power to the maximum level for one cooking zone in the pair and automatically decreases in the second cooking zone to a lower power level. The display for the reduced zone alternates. If you want maximum power in two pans, they need to be in opposite zones.
Sensitive touch controls.


All controls have a **child lock** safety feature.
Pan detection The induction cooktop will not work if there is no pan on the heating zone or the pan is not suitable. Also, if the pan is removed from the cooking zone, the operation is stopped and a symbol is displayed. The symbol disappears when the pan is put back to the heating zone and cooking continues with the power level set before. If unsuitable cookware is used, a symbol indicates this and after a short period of time the cooking zone switches itself off.
Residual heat indicator is a symbol shown until the cooking zone temperature is reduced to a safe temperature.
Digital control readings give temperature accuracy.
Timer Each cooking zone has its own timer.

The cooking zone is not obvious on some induction cooktops, so keep a close eye on where you place your cookware

< their surface is not flat on the cooktop. Specialised induction cooktops do have wok designs built into them, but these are very expensive.

You'll need to keep an eye on where you put cookware and make sure it covers the cooking zone, as it's not obvious where this zone is unless it's clearly marked out. All models on test except the Smeg have obvious markings. It's strongly recommended to follow the installation instructions, as ventilation of the cooktop has to be taken into account.

Standby power

We didn't expect to find any standby energy on an induction cooktop. As small as the cost is, standby energy costs mount with every appliance you own. Some manufacturers claim the cooktop needs an ongoing current to recognise the touch controls, and are working to reduce the standby power in the future. In this test, the Omega cooktop does not have any standby energy costs; we look forward to seeing other manufacturers achieve this goal. ■

HOW WE TEST

Performance Our tester, Fiona Mair, assesses how well the cooktops can heat a white sauce on low heat setting, boil rice for turn-down capacity, melt chocolate for sensitive cooking and do a vegetable and beef stir fry on high heat setting for a short time.
Ease of use She determines how easy the cooktops are to clean and judges their controls.
Standby energy is also measured, but not scored.

PRODUCT	PERFORMANCE					SPECIFICATIONS			
Brand / model (in rank order; alphabetical where equal)	Overall score (%)	Cooking performance score (%)	Ease of use score (40%)	Annual standby cost ($)	Power boost	Dimensions (cm, W x D)	Installation dimensions (mm, W x D)	Contact	Price ($)
Omega OI64BB	93	99	84	0.00		58 x 51	54 x 48	omegaappliances.com.au	1799
Fisher & Paykel CI604DTB1	91	99	80	1.60	√	60 x 53	54 x 48	fp.com.au	2199
Smeg SIHP264B	91	98	81	0.92	√	59 x 52	56 x 49	smegappliances.com.au	2190
Westinghouse PHN644DU	91	96	84	1.87	√	61 x 52	56 x 49	westinghouse.com.au	1589
Electrolux EHD60150P	88	90	84	0.58	√	59 x 52	56 x 48	electrolux.com.au	2269
Asko HI1661	85	93	72	1.18	√	58 x 51	56 x 49	asko.com.au	2399
Bosch PIE645Q14E	84	94	70	0.83	√	58 x 51	56 x 49	bosch.com.au	2599

USING THE TABLE **Score** The overall score is made up of: Cooking performance: 60%, Ease of use: 40%. **Annual standby cost** Based on 17c/kWh. **Price** Recommended retail, as of February 2010.

STORY MARTHA PSIROUKIS

Uncool behaviour

LG is cheating the Australian standard for energy efficiency by modifying the temperature performance of one of its fridges.

NUTSHELL

>> The LG GC-L197NFS side-by-side fridge cheats the Minimum Energy Performance Standard (MEPS) and misleads consumers into thinking its energy use is lower than it is under normal conditions.

>> A Whirlpool fridge has an unpredictable freezer that warms up on the coldest freezer setting.

>> Six new refrigerators on test, but none make it into our What to Buy list.

CHOICE has discovered that LG's relatively new and very popular GC-L197NFS side-by-side fridge has an energy-saving mode that's activated when it detects energy efficiency testing conditions. This is known as a circumvention device, and the use of such a device does not comply with the relevant testing standard.

When this fridge detects an ambient temperature between 22°C and 34°C and the door is not opened for some time, it goes into an energy-saving mode. While this feature can be perceived as a good one, as it switches to this mode within typical kitchen temperatures and not just the energy test ambient of 32°C, it can be detrimental to the quality of your food. It saves energy by allowing longer compressor-off cycles that result in large temperature fluctuations in the freezer.

Temperature swings potentially compromise the quality of your food. A good indicator of this is that ice crystals will start to form in your ice-cream, which then becomes gritty and eventually yellows. The warmer your freezer, the quicker this will happen, so you may find your food doesn't keep as long as you'd expect it to. This fridge also goes into an energy-saving mode after a defrost cycle that can happen at any time, further lengthening the time your food is >

WHAT TO BUY

These are the best refrigerators in each size range. Best Buys are good performers with a good reliability rating and are relatively cheap to buy and run. Where possible, we've included both top (T) and bottom (B) freezers in each size range. The products in the What to Buy list and the table change from test to test, as new products are released and tested, and older models go off the market.

For profiles of the fridges in our What to Buy list, see *CHOICE*, September 2009, May 2009, November 2008, May 2008, November 2007, May 2007, November 2006, May 2006, November 2005, May 2005. You'll also find them in the appropriate month at **www.choiceextra.com.au**.

LESS THAN 300L

May 08	**Whirlpool** WRI27SW (T)	$879

300L-375L

May 06	**Fisher & Paykel** Elegance E372B (B)	$1399
Nov 05	**Fisher & Paykel** Tasman E331T (T)	$1029
May 09	**Westinghouse** WBM3700WB (B)	$1269

376L-450L

May 06	**Fisher & Paykel** Tasman E381T (T)	$1149
May 05	**Fisher & Paykel** Elegance E440T (T) (A)	$1729
May 05	**Fisher & Paykel** Tasman E442B (B) (A)	$1899
Sept 09	**Electrolux** ETM4407SC (T)	$2589

451L-525L

Nov 06	**Fisher & Paykel** Elegance E521T (T) (A)	$1929
Sept 09	**Westinghouse** WBM5100WB (B)	$1899
Nov 08	**Fisher & Paykel** E522BRXFDU (B) (A)	$2829

MORE THAN 525L, INCLUDING FRENCH DOOR

Nov 07	**Fisher & Paykel** RF610A (FD)	$3599
Nov 08	**Sharp** SJ-F60PC (FD)	$3387

SIDE-BY-SIDE

Nov 05	**Westinghouse** WSE6100WA	$2009

(B) Freezer on bottom. (T) Freezer on top. (FD) French doors. (A) Discontinued, but may still be available in some stores.

CHOICE believes making energy-efficient fridges is important, but shouldn't be at the expense of fundamental performance

< stored st fluctuating temperatures and increasing the risk of your food being spoiled.

We advise using a good temperature thermometer to help you set and maintain temperatures of 3°C in the fresh food compartment and -18°C in the freezer.

Argument for the defence

LG claims the GC-L197NFS's annual energy consumption is 738kWh, but our testing shows it uses about 876kWh when bypassing the energy-saving mode. So under these "normal" conditions – i.e. regular door openings and using a national average electricity cost of 17 cents per kWh, it may cost you an extra $235 over 10 years – the expected life of a fridge.

But the actual costs are likely to be much more if the proposed increase in electricity costs over the next three years eventuates – particularly in NSW, where the proposed rise is 62% over three years, in which case the out-of-pocket difference is about $200 in just three years with a starting point average of 17c/kWh. However, individual consumers may already be paying much higher prices, such as for green energy, so the impact could be even greater, especially if the freezer is set to the recommended -18°C and not just the -15°C as required for the energy efficiency tests.

LG also claims the fridge is designed this way because most kitchens are between 22°C-34°C, so reducing its energy use at these temperatures can save money. While the company knows circumvention modes are restricted by the Minimum Energy Performance Standards (MEPS), this fridge and the similar GC-P197WFS model still somehow "slipped through the net" and were released and sold.

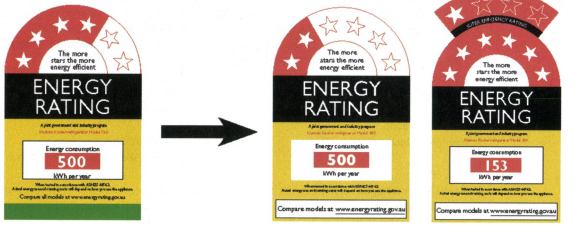
LG told us in December 2009 that the model we tested had been discontinued and would be replaced by the GC-L197STS in early 2010, which was to have new logic and a linear compressor. But our checks with retailers in February 2010 found the GC-L197NFS is still a strong seller and stock is still available, with more shipments arriving. After checking with LG, they claimed the GC-P197WFS was discontinued and that the GC-L197NFS had been updated to ensure that the energy consumption matches the registered level of 738kWh. LG said it would write to retailers informing them of the issue and asking them to return any unsold stock.

Further, LG says these two affected models were mistakenly registered to the new standard using the old standard test method, and were only sold between September and December 2009. The company is offering an energy label rebate of $331.20 (the cost of extra energy use at 20c/kWh over 12 years) to compensate consumers

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

A **new energy star rating label** will be introduced this month, which uses a different star rating algorithm to allow further improvement in energy efficiency. This means a fridge that previously rated four stars will now only have two stars. It doesn't mean it's less efficient – the star ratings have just been calculated differently, so be sure to also compare the kWh/year.

All fridges manufactured or imported from 1 April 2010 must carry the new label and be registered to the latest Standard. But stock made or imported before this date can continue to be sold until further notice. Over this transitional period, both labels will be displayed in stores. The new labels will not have a green bar on the bottom, and they can accommodate super energy efficient machines up to 10 stars by adding a four-star crown above the label.



who purchased an affected model. CHOICE believes the compensation should be higher to accommodate the expected electricity cost rise. Contact LG on 1300 542 273 or your retailer for more information.

LG's poor form

LG has a chequered history of making false and misleading claims. For example, in 2004, LG made 4A-rated water efficiency claims for numerous washing machines before they were certified. They gave court-enforceable undertakings to the ACCC to place a corrective notice on its Australian website, send a corrective notice to retailers, and upgrade and maintain its trade practices compliance program.

In 2006, LG gave court-enforceable undertakings to offer consumers rebates to cover the extra energy costs that five of its air conditioners would use based on overstated efficiency on the energy labels. Again, LG was requested to review and upgrade its trade practices compliance program.

So it's clear LG are repeat offenders who have not learnt from their past mistakes and are failing to demonstrate respect for regulations, the environment and consumers. As part of our GreenWatch campaign, CHOICE has filed a complaint with the ACCC about the matter. We're calling on the regulator to conduct a thorough investigation. >

WHIRLPOOL'S BAFFLING BAFFLE CONTROL

Our tester noticed the Whirlpool WRID41TW freezer temperature baffle control actually makes the freezer warmer when set on the coldest setting. Whirlpool verified the coldest possible setting is when the dot marked on the control knob is in the vicinity of the same line with letter F, for "Fast Ice".

Whirlpool will change its baffle control design to ensure the airflow control damper stops at the coldest position only. New models manufactured from mid-March with a serial number beginning with "INE1011 ..." will have the new baffle controls. If you have already purchased this fridge, this problem can be resolved by modifying the control such that it stops at the coldest position.

Contact Whirlpool on 1300 363 344 to find a local authorised service engineer, for help with Whirlpool appliances or for pre-buy information.

LG Electronics are repeat offenders who are failing to respect regulations, the environment and consumers

HOW WE TEST

Temperature performance Our tester, Ben Rossetto, checks there is an appropriate range of temperatures in the fresh food and freezer compartments at the same time. He also assesses temperature fluctuations, as even temperatures are an important factor in maintaining food quality; how uniform the temperature is throughout each compartment; and he measures the effect on refrigerator and freezer temperatures when the external temperature changes, such as from summer to winter.

Ease of use Ben considers three main factors: storage, loading/unloading and general versatility aspects; ease of cleaning; and ease of understanding and using controls to obtain appropriate temperatures in varying external conditions.

Energy efficiency This is tested to the Australian Standard. Ben also checks the energy label required by law to be displayed on new refrigerators.

Fresh food cooling speed Ben tests the cooling strength and the fridge's ability to recognise that cooling is needed in the fresh food compartment.

Crisper freshness He measures how well the crisper keeps unwrapped vegetables from being dried out.

BEST VALUE BEST VALUE BEST VALUE BEST VALUE BEST VALUE
choice shopper

For the best deal, call CHOICE Shopper, 1300 360 655, with the model name and number, the price you want to beat and your CHOICE personal subscriber number. The full range of models on test may not be available in all states.

PRODUCT			PERFORMANCE								
Brand / model (in rank order within groups)	Freezer	Number of doors	Overall score (%)	Temperature performance score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Energy efficiency score (%)	Fresh food cooling speed score (%)	Crisper freshness score (%)	Cooling time (hr:min)	Claimed / measured energy use (kWh/year)	
LESS THAN 300L											
Whirlpool WRI27SW	Top	2	74	75	68	82	58	86	6:14	400 / 433	4
300L-375L											
Fisher & Paykel Elegance E372B (A)	Bottom	2	77	72	72	84	76	95	4:14	498 / 482	3
Fisher & Paykel Tasman E331T (A) (B)	Top	2	76	68	71	91	78	90	4:13	407 / 388	3
Westinghouse WBM3700WB	Bottom	2	74	74	67	84	64	86	5:11	495 / 481	3
376L-450L											
Fisher & Paykel Tasman E381T (A)	Top	2	79	77	71	90	81	80	3:42	433 / 424	3
Fisher & Paykel Elegance E440T (A) (B) (C)	Top	2	78	73	76	92	82	73	3:33	476 / 437	3
Fisher & Paykel Tasman E442B (A) (B) (C)	Bottom	2	76	72	76	84	68	92	4:40	583 / 527	3
Electrolux ETM4407SC	Top	2	75	68	73	100	63	71	5:04	369 / 353	3
Fisher & Paykel Elegance E402B (A)	Bottom	2	74	72	75	78	59	94	5:24	528 / 561	3
Fisher & Paykel Elegance E406B	Bottom	2	74	76	75	78	56	80	5:37	564 / 559	3
Fisher & Paykel Elegance E411T	Top	2	74	63	74	86	83	80	3:29	454 / 478	3
Kelvinator KTM4400WB	Top	2	74	69	71	89	66	78	4:50	486 / 464	3
Westinghouse WTM4200P	Top	2	74	69	67	90	72	74	4:26	468 / 445	3
Westinghouse WBM4300WB	Bottom	2	73	70	67	83	69	82	4:40	530 / 529	3
Westinghouse WTM4400WB	Top	2	73	73	66	85	83	69	4:37	486 / 503	4
451L-525L											
Fisher & Paykel Elegance E521T (A) (C)	Top	2	78	76	72	89	82	75	3:24	508 / 496	3
Electrolux EBM5107SA (C)	Bottom	2	77	80	70	89	58	83	5:13	589 / 510	3
Westinghouse WBM5100WB	Bottom	2	76	74	70	87	68	86	4:34	560 / 526	3
Fisher & Paykel E522BRXFDU (Ice & water) (C)	Bottom	2	75	70	75	79	83	78	3:20	636 / 627	3
Fisher & Paykel Elegance E522B (A)	Bottom	2	73	69	75	78	69	78	4:29	596 / 642	3
Westinghouse WTM5200WB	Top	2	73	66	76	83	69	80	4:28	508 / 569	4
Kelvinator KBM5100MB	Bottom	2	72	72	68	81	57	86	5:16	589 / 593	3
MORE THAN 525L, INCLUDING FRENCH DOOR											
Fisher & Paykel RF610A	Bottom	3	77	78	65	79	78	92	3:42	695 / 688	3
Sharp SJ-F60PC	Bottom	4	73	74	69	83	49	83	5:37	765 / 644	3
LG GR-B218STS (C)	Bottom	3	66	55	61	88	72	79	4:48	678 / 582	3
SIDE-BY-SIDE											
Westinghouse WSE6100WA (A)	LH side	2	77	76	73	79	81	76	3:26	687 / 705	4
Bosch KAN56V10AU	LH side	2	74	73	71	85	65	74	4:37	630 / 636	3
Whirlpool 6GD5SHGXSS	LH side	2	74	76	77	90	32	85	6:27	740 / 639	4
Daewoo FRS-U20ICW	LH side	2	73	72	71	82	68	69	4:25	650 / 665	3
Bosch KAN58A40AU	LH side	2	72	71	73	74	63	77	4:47	750 / 758	3
Samsung Quattro SRS752QDUS	LH side	4	72	66	72	75	75	91	3:48	866 / 873	3

FEATURES				SPECIFICATIONS								COSTS	
	Chiller	Crisper drawer	Dairy compartment	Door hinge position	Dimensions (cm, H x W x D)	Claimed total volume (L)	Claimed volume, fresh food (L)	Claimed volume, freezer (L)	Contact	10-year running costs ($)	Price ($)
	√ (D)	1		Rev	171 x 56 x 65	268	204	64	whirlpool.com.au	736	879
		2	√	R or L	160 x 64 x 70	373	250	123	fisherpaykel.com.au	819	1399
		1	√	Rev	143 x 64 x 69	329	232	97	fisherpaykel.com.au	660	1029
		1	√	R or L	162 x 66 x 71	365	243	122	westinghouse.com.au	818	1269
		1	√	Rev	161 x 64 x 70	380	283	97	fisherpaykel.com.au	721	1149
		1	√	R or L	170 x 69 x 70	447	342	105	fisherpaykel.com.au	743	1729
		2	√	Rev	170 x 69 x 71	442	307	135	fisherpaykel.com.au	896	1899
		1	√	R or L	172 x 71 x 71	442	339	103	electrolux.com.au	600	2589
		2	√	R or L	171 x 64 x 70	403	280	123	fisherpaykel.com.au	954	1649
		2	√	R or L	160 x 68 x 70	404	271	133	fisherpaykel.com.au	950	1649
		1	√	R or L	170 x 64 x 70	411	314	97	fisherpaykel.com.au	813	1379
		1	√	R or L	172 x 71 x 71	431	339	103	kelvinator.com.au	789	1219
		1	√	R or L	164 x 71 x 71	416	313	103	westinghouse.com.au	757	1429
		1	√	R or L	173 x 72 x 71	431	300	131	westinghouse.com.au	899	1529
		1	√	R or L	172 x 70 x 71	442	339	103	westinghouse.com.au	855	1379
		1	√	R or L	170 x 80 x 71	517	400	117	fisherpaykel.com.au	843	1929
		2	√	R or L	173 x 81 x 71	505	349	156	electrolux.com.au	867	2849
		2	√	R or L	173 x 81 x 71	505	349	156	westinghouse.com.au	894	1899
5 / 2.0		2	√	R only	171 x 80 x 70	519	360	159	fisherpaykel.com.au	1066	2829
		2	√	R or L	170 x 80 x 71	519	360	159	fisherpaykel.com.au	1091	2059
		2	√	R or L	172 x 80 x 71	517	396	121	westinghouse.com.au	967	1689
		2	√	R or L	173 x 81 x 71	504	348	156	kelvinator.com.au	1008	1799
5 / 2.0		2	√	(E)	178 x 91 x 69	614	433	181	fisherpaykel.com.au	1170	3599
		1	√	(E)	172 x 90 x 78	602	370	232	sharp.net.au	1095	3387
	√	3	√	(E)	178 x 91 x 72	622	423	199	lge.com.au	873	2799
		2	√	na	176 x 90 x 71	606	357	249	westinghouse.com.au	1199	2009
		2	√	na	180 x 91 x 68	618	377	241	boschappliances.com.au	1081	2049
5 / 4.5	√ (D)	1	√	na	178 x 91 x 79	740	445	295	whirlpool.com.au	1086	4149
	√ (D)	2	√	na	180 x 91 x 68	618	377	241	daewooelectronics.com.au	1131	1399
5 / 1.5		1	√	na	180 x 91 x 69	603	377	226	boschappliances.com.au	1289	2999
0 / 3.0	√	1	√	na	179 x 92 x 86	752	347	293	samsung.com.au	1484	4999

USING THE TABLE

Scores The overall score is made up of: Temperature performance: 40%; Ease of use: 20%; Energy efficiency: 20%; Fresh food cooling speed: 12%; Crisper freshness: 8%.

Noise level These are comparative measurements. Refrigerators can sound noticeably louder as the compressor starts and stops and may make unusual noises during automatic defrosting.

Claimed volumes These tell you how much air space the fridge has to cool; less space is available for storage. Use the volumes to get an idea of how big the freezer is compared with the fresh-food compartment.

10-year running costs are calculated at a rate of 17c per kWh. A 10-year period gives a useful indication of the long-term differences between high and low energy use – and you should be able to expect your fridge to last at least this long.

TABLE NOTES

na Not applicable – doors are side-by-side.

Rev Reversible door.

(A) We generally test the basic white version of a model. Fridges with this footnote are available in other styles and finishes. Some can also be built into cabinets with a door kit that matches your kitchen cupboards.

(B) New crisper and/or freezer bins have been added since our test, which may slightly affect their scores.

(C) Discontinued, but may still be available in some stores.

(D) This chiller was too warm in our tests for optimal storage of highly perishable foods.

(E) The fresh food compartment has two French door-style doors.

MISSING MODELS

CHOICE has now tested so many refrigerators they can't all fit into one table. We've dropped from the table those that don't perform as well, but are still available in shops. The missing models – which include all the newly tested models – are shown here with their price and overall score. If you see one for a good price and are interested in buying it, check out its details on **www.choiceextra.com.au**. For more on the new models, see About the Rest, right.

MISSING MODELS

Brand / model (in rank order within categories)	Type	Overall score (%)	Price ($)
LESS THAN 300L			
LG GN-253CW (A)	T	67	699
Fisher & Paykel E249	T	54	819
300L-375L			
# Samsung SRL322MW	B	62	899
376L-450L			
LG GN-422 FW (A)	T	69	1099
Kelvinator KBM4300WB	B	68	1319
# Samsung SR394NW	T	67	999
Mitsubishi MR-420U-W-A	T	66	1289
Samsung SR419MSS (A)	T	64	1399
# Whirlpool WRID41TW	T	63	999
Daewoo FR-4501W	T	62	799
451L-525L			
# Electrolux EBM5100SC (B)	B	74	2379
Samsung SR502NXA (A)	T	69	1399
# LG GN-R466FT	T	67	1781
MORE THAN 525L			
Haier HTMR575SS	T	64	1999
SIDE-BY-SIDE			
Smeg SR650XA	na	69	2790
# LG GC-L197NFS (A)	na	53	2644

 # Newly tested model. T=freezer on top. B=freezer on the bottom.
(A) *Discontinued, but may still be available in some shops.* ***(B)*** *The EBM5107SC is technically similar to the EBM5100SC but has a flat E-line style door, $2849.*

ABOUT THE REST

The following explains why the newly tested models didn't make it into either the What to Buy list or the table (page 40).

300L–375L

The **Samsung SRL322MW** is quite good at fresh food cooling, its freezer can be set very cold (-23°C) and it handles seasonal change very well. But fresh food temperatures tend to be rather cold with normal or colder freezer settings, the controls don't allow fine freezer temperature adjustment, and it's only OK for ease of use, with particularly limited storage versatility.

376L–450L

The **Samsung SR394NW** has a good temperature range, very good freezer temperature reserve (approximately -30°C), and good temperature uniformity. But it has poor fresh food cooling ability, fresh food can freeze in winter unless controls are adjusted, it's only OK for crisper humidity and ease of use, and the chiller is a little too warm.

The **Whirlpool WRID41TW** has a good temperature range, and its freezer can be set very cold (-22°C). But the freezer can get too warm in winter unless the controls are adjusted, it has moderate temperature fluctuations as the compressor stops and starts, poor crisper humidity, and it's only OK for ease of use, with particularly limited storage versatility, and the chiller is much too warm for its purpose. See Whirlpool's Baffling Baffle Control, page 39, for more.

451L–525L

The **Electrolux EBM5100SC** is excellent for energy efficiency, its controls allow a good range of temperature combinations and the freezer can be set especially cold (-24°C). It also has good storage versatility and height adjustable rollers to help with cleaning. But on the downside it has borderline cooling ability, and the freezer can get much too warm in winter unless the controls are adjusted.

The **LG GN-R466FT's** freezer can be set especially cold (-22°C), and handles seasonal change well. But its range of temperature settings is limited (e.g. the freezer on the warmest setting may be too cold), and it's only OK for crisper humidity.

SIDE-BY-SIDE

In addition to the details listed in the main story, the **LG GC-L197NFS** has poor basic temperature management, is only OK for fresh food cooling and crisper humidity, has a very cold freezer and very warm fresh food section when the controls are on the mid/default settings. It has a limited temperature range (the fresh food on coldest setting may be too warm, and the freezer on warmest setting may be too cold). The freezer control doesn't allow fine temperature adjustment, the dairy compartment is the coldest place in the fresh food section (it should be the warmest), it has very large freezer temperature swings, and its chiller is too warm for its purpose. On the upside, its freezer can be set especially cold (-27°C), and it handles seasonal changes well.

RELIABILITY

Our latest information on reliability will be published in the May issue of CHOICE. Go to www.choice.com.au/appliancereliability to see our last appliance reliability report.

STORY DENIS GALLAGHER

Almost ready to play

Radios that only do digital are still far too expensive and digital radio isn't yet broadcast widely enough.

NUTSHELL

>> Digital radio reception needs to be more widely available – and digital radios more affordable – before it becomes a compelling alternative to the current AM/FM analog setup.

>> Some radios on test are good value for money provided you use all the digital radio and network features on offer.

In 2009, CHOICE tested a selection of the then-latest digital radios on offer (*CHOICE*, July 2009). This time round, we considered testing relatively more affordable digital radios, but found the prices being asked for even the most basic models are still incredibly high compared with similarly featured AM/FM radios. Instead, we've included models with some added versatility that at least partially justifies their exorbitant price tags.

On test are 10 models, ranging from $170 to $1000, that offer more than just digital radio. If you have a broadband internet connection with wireless networking you can use any of these radios to listen to one of thousands of internet radio stations, as well as listen to your music collection stored on your home network PC or hard drive using Wi-Fi (see What to Look For, page 45). Some of the models also allow you to hook up to your home network using an ethernet cable. Most of these radios generally offer satisfactory sound quality and a wide range of features and functions. All can tune into FM stations, however none support analog AM radio.

Where is digital radio being broadcast?

The ABC and most popular commercial radio stations are broadcasting in both analog and digital modes in Adelaide, Brisbane, Melbourne, Perth and Sydney. Before buying a digital radio, visit www.digitalradioplus.com.au and type in your postcode to see if you're in a good reception area. If you live outside these city areas, you can forget about digital radio for the next 12 months at least.

Australia uses the DAB+ standard for digital radio, and the models on test are yet to take full advantage of the features and functions digital radio has to offer. This means you may need to upgrade your radio's operating system to do things such as pause a live broadcast or enjoy the range of digital information available, such >

WHAT TO BUY

82% Sangean WFR-1D Plus

PRICE $699

The Sangean was the top performer in our sound quality test and also returned an excellent result for reception, getting an uninterrupted performance even in the most marginal areas. The unit is easy to use when listening to digital or internet radio, with good sized text and intuitive menu structure. However, this is a true tabletop radio and not one to carry around the home too much, as it is fairly heavy.

79% Pure Avanti Flow

PRICE $749

The Pure Avanti Flow is a good all-round entertainment option for the home, with an iPod dock, good sound quality and excellent reception even in difficult areas. The remote control is easy to use and has a handy back button. The Avanti is the heaviest model on test at more than 4kgs, and like the Sangean cannot be classed as a portable radio.

If you only want to listen to digital radio broadcasts, we suggest waiting until digital radios become more affordable

< as song titles and graphics. This is usually done by downloading a file from the internet and loading it into the radio via the USB connection. All radios on test except the Revo, OXX and Monitor Audio have a USB port.

DAB has been in use in the UK for some time, but DAB-only radios won't work here, so make sure any radio you may buy overseas is designed to handle DAB+.

If you have a wireless home network and broadband internet connection, you might find this type of radio/media player a suitable choice. However, if you only want to listen to digital radio, wait until models become more affordable. There is no compelling reason to choose digital over analog until the service is more widespread, the digital radios come down in price and the digital services on offer provide something worth moving over from the well-serviced and widely available AM/FM bands. ■

ABOUT THE REST

The **Tivoli** and **Pure Sensia** radios are among the easiest to use, and both are able to capture an excellent digital radio reception at the marginal reception broadcast location. They would have made our recommended list except for a sound performance that was below our top two performers. The Tivoli's support for external speakers should deliver better sound quality, although this would make it a fairly expensive tabletop radio. The Sensia is the most eye-catching design, and its large colour LCD screen makes it the easiest model to select stations and work through the menu.

The lightweight **Revo** was equal-best in our reception test but scored second-last for our sound quality. It would be an expensive clock radio, even given its iPod dock.

The **Kogan** is priced similarly to a standard iPod dock but comes with more features and functionality. It's good value for money if you live in a good reception area for digital radio and are willing to take a little time getting used to the controls and can see the details on the small screen.

The **Roberts** and **Pure Evoke Flow** are the only two models on test that are truly portable, with carry handles and battery power as an option. The Roberts also has an ethernet cable connection.

The **OXX** produces good volume levels and has an ethernet connection.

The **Monitor Audio** performed well for digital reception and is fairly easy to use, but is let down by its poor sound and a background hiss that was evident throughout the listening test.

PRODUCT	PERFORMANCE				FEATURES						SPECIFICATIONS			
Brand / model (in rank order)	Overall score (%)	Sound score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Reception score (%)	Additional speaker support	Remote control	iPod dock	USB port	Ethernet (LAN) connection	Dedicated line-out	Speaker type (Stereo/Mono)	Station / menu selection	Station presets	Display type
Sangean WFR-1D Plus	82	78	71	97		√		(B)	√	√	S	Menu and remote	10DAB+, 10FM, 10net	LCD
Pure Avanti Flow	79	74	68	97		√	√	(B)			S	Front or remote	30DAB+, 10FM, 10net	OLED
Tivoli Audio Networks+	73	67	71	83	√	√		√	√	√	M	Button x 5, rear	5DAB+, 5FM, 5net	LCD
Pure Sensia	71	66	74	73		√	(A)	(B)			S	Touchscreen	30DAB+, 10FM, 10net	LCD c
Revo iblik Radio Station	70	50	68	97		√	√				M	Button x 10, top	10DAB+, 10FM	LCD
Kogan KGNDRVA	65	63	60	73			√	√			M	Button x 5, front	5DAB+, 5FM, 5net	LCD
Roberts Stream 202	60	53	62	67				(B)	√		S	Button x 5, top	5DAB+, 5FM, 5net	LCD
OXX Digital Classic + DAB	59	68	60	47					√		M	Button x 4, front	4DAB+, 4FM, 4net	LCD
Pure Evoke Flow	58	60	56	57	√	(A)	(A)	(B)		√	M	Buttons, front	30DAB+, 10FM, 10net	OLED
Monitor Audio AirStream 10	57	29	63	87					√	√	M	Touch x 4, top	4DAB+, 4FM, 4net	OLED

USING THE TABLE Scores The overall score is made up of: Sound quality: 40%; Ease of use: 30% Reception: 30%. **Standby energy use** Our tester measures the radio's standby energy use with the display at minimum brightness; at this level, annual costs range from less than $1 for the OXX up to $6.60 for the Pure Avanti Flow. **Features** See What to Look For, above right. **Station / menu selection** indicates location whether the selection buttons are on the unit or remote control. **Station presets** allow you to select your favourite stations and assign them to a button or special listing in the radio's m **Display type** indicates whether the screen is liquid crystal display (LCD) or organic light emitting diode (OLED). All screens are mono (except where stated). **Price** Recommended retail, as of March 2010.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Batteries provide portability as well as making the radio a useful information source if the power goes out. Normal batteries (such as AA) are a better option than battery packs because they're more readily available.

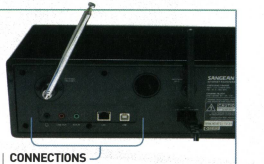
iPod dock The Pure Avanti Flow, Revo and Kogan radios have built-in docks, while a dock is available for the Pure Evoke Flow and Pure Sensia as an optional extra.

Screen size and **shape** are important so you can see the scrolling text, particularly when searching for a station by entering the name. Of the models on test, only the Pure Sensia has a colour display, which may be an advantage once additional digital radio features such as album covers and other graphics become readily available.

Wireless networking (Wi-Fi) allows you to stream music data without the need for a physical network connection. This opens up a huge number of radio programs from around the world and also allows you to play music stored on your PC in other areas of your home. All models on test can access internet radio stations and podcasts. However, internet radio uses about 60-80MB of data per hour, so make sure you have a generous broadband plan if you want to listen to a lot of internet radio.

Speakers The radios on test have either mono or stereo speakers, although stereo does not necessarily ensure better sound quality than a mono speaker. An additional speaker can be added to the Tivoli and Pure Evoke Flow to provide stereo separation.

Clock with an alarm Useful for waking up, but can also remind you a program is about to start. Digital radios can update their clock from the broadcast, so they should keep accurate time and recover well after a power outage. All radios on test have a clock and at least one alarm.



CONNECTIONS

USB connection This allows you to perform firmware upgrades on the digital radio if necessary or play music stored on USB storage devices. Only the Tivoli and Kogan models allow you to play music from a USB storage device or connect an iPod or MP3 player.

Ethernet (LAN) connection allows the radio to be connected to a network router via an ethernet cable.

Line-out socket is useful if you want to connect your radio to another sound system as it should have no amplification.

Headphone socket allows you to listen in private and can sometimes also act as a line-out. All models on test have one.

Characters)	Display dimensions (mm, W x H)	Batteries	Dimensions (cm, H x W x D)	Weight (kg)	Contact	Price ($)
24	55 x 30		11.5 x 33 x 23.5	3.8	sangean.com.au	699
24	66 x 35		12 x 35 x 24	4.3	pure.com/au	749
16	53 x 37		22.5 x 14 x 14.5	1.9	tivoliaudio.com.au	999
table	111 x 84	(C)	19 x 28 x 15	2.2	pure.com/au	749
18	65 x 22		7.5 x 25.5 x 13.5	0.7	bushaustralia.com.au	349
16	60 x 15		14.5 x 25.5 x 16	1.4	kogan.com.au	169
24	63 x 30	6 x D	18 x 27 x 10.5	1.5	robertsradio.com.au	429
24	59 x 19		13.5 x 25 x 15	1.9	oxxdigital.com.au	299
24	66 x 35	(C)	15 x 21 x 11.5	1.5	pure.com/au	449
24	47 x 29		14 x 33.5 x 9.5	1.9	monitoraudio.co.uk	549

LE NOTES All radios on test have a back button (except the Pure Sensia), clock, alarm and m headphone socket. All are capable of wireless networking (802.11b/g). **(A)** Available as ptional extra. **(B)** USB connection for upgrades only. **(C)** Accepts an optional proprietary argeable battery pack.

HOW WE TEST

Sound quality Our testers, Scott O'Keefe and Rebecca Gatto, listen to the same six stereo music tracks at the same volume on each radio. They listen for distortion, rattles or other odd noises, stereo separation where appropriate and a natural sound across all frequencies.

Ease of use Our tester, James Thomson, uses all the main functions to assess ease of use – in particular, ease of the initial setup, clear labelling, placement and functionality of the buttons and knobs, size and clarity of the display, whether menus are intuitive and logical, and the remote control where applicable.

Reception James checks for reception quality in three different locations. The first site is classed as optimal reception, while the second site represents an area of marginal reception. The final test involves an area with difficult reception due to its distance from the broadcast tower and no line of site for the signal to reach the radio.

STORY MATTHEW STEEN

In the frame

Digital photo frames now come with some novel tricks, but could still be easier to use.

NUTSHELL

>> 15 digital photo frames on test, including eight newly tested models.

>> Picture quality continues to improve in some frames, and many now come with nifty extra features.

CHOICE's latest testing of digital photo frames shows that wireless capability is becoming more common, and manufacturers are starting to integrate printers into the frames. Ease of use, however, remains less than adequate for most on test.

Picture quality has improved. The liquid crystal displays (LCD) used for displaying pictures are improving with each test, which means your family photo is less likely to look like a cartoonish blob of colour. When you go shopping for your frame, take a memory stick with some favourite photos and ask to see them shown on the frame.

Lack of a remote control, awkward on-board control access and touch-sensitive frames that don't react accurately enough are just some of the ease of use issues. The new wireless technology only compounds the complexity of digital frames, resulting in manuals with assumed knowledge, jargon about wireless security and some disappointing results. We cannot include two Kodak frames in our What to Buy list (right) because of their poor ease of use, despite having the best picture quality we've seen so far.

PRODUCT	PERFORMANCE				FEATURES									
Brand/model (in rank order)	Overall score (%)	Picture quality score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Standby energy consumption score (%)	Remote control	Wireless	Inbuilt printer	AC / Rechargeable battery	Speakers	Cards accepted	Stand orientation (Landscape / Portrait)	Internal memory (MB)	Aspect ratio	
Agfaphoto AF6105MS	75	84	50	100	√			√ / -	√	CF / MMC / MS / SD / SDHC / xD	L	256	15:9	
# **Kodak** EasyShare W1020	74	89	34	100		√		√ / -	√	CF / MMC / MS / SD / SDHC / xD	L / P	512	15:9	
# **Kodak** EasyShare W820	74	89	34	100		√		√ / -	√	CF / MMC / MS / SD / SDHC / xD	L / P	512	16:9	
Sony DPF-V1000	74	72	70	100	√			√ / -		CF / MS / SD / SDHC	L	1024	15:9	
# **D-Link** DSM-210	72	76	55	100	√	√		√ / -		MMC / MS / SD	L / P	1000	15:9	
# **AVLabs** AVL971WiFi	71	72	59	100	√	√		√ / -	√	CF / MMC / MS / SD / xD	L	128	15:9	
Digiframe DF-F10411c	71	75	52	100	√			√ / -	√	CF / MMC / MS / SD / xD	L / P	512	12:9	
Kodak EasyShare M1020	67	78	35	100				√ / -	√	CF / MMC / MS / SD / xD	L / P	128	16:9	
# **Olin** DPF-808	66	64	58	100	√		√	√ / -	√	CF / MMC / MS / SD / xD	L / P	128	12:9	
Shintaro SHDPF104V3	66	65	55	100	√			√ / -	√	CF / MMC / MS / SD / SDHC	L	256	12:9	
# **Samsung** SPF-105V	63	70	36	100		√		√ / √	√	CF / MS / SD	L / P	64	15:9	
# **ABit** FunFab P80-A1	62	57	58	100	√		√	√ / -	√	MMC / MS / SD	L / P	128	12:9	
# **SmartParts** SPX8WFEF	59	71	53	0	√	√		√ / -		CF / MMC / MS / SD / xD	L / P	512	12:9	
JCMatthew DPF-BWP10	59	69	58	0	√			√ / -	√	CF / MMC / MS / SD	L / P	256	16:9	
Kaiser Baas Snapshot KBA04023	58	53	55	100	√			√ / -	√	CF / MMC / MS / SD	L	256	12:9	

USING THE TABLE Scores The overall score is made up of: Picture quality: 60%; Ease of use: 30%; Standby energy consumption: 10%. **Features** See Choice Online, right. **Cards accepted** CF = Compact Flas MMC = MultiMedia Card, MS = Memory Stick, SD = Secure Digital, xD = xD Picture Card, SDHC = Same size as SD but higher capacity and transfer speed. **Price** Recommended retail, as of March 2010.

If, however, you're willing to persevere with one of the wireless frames (see table below), once you connect them to the internet you'll have access to a range of handy extra features, such as online photo archives, weather and news updates. Two of the newly tested models also have an inbuilt printer for normal sized photos (4" x 6") – but both come at a cost of high-priced refills and much thicker frames. See our online story at **www.choice.com.au/dpf** for more.

HOW WE TEST

Picture quality Our expert test panel assesses colour balance, contrast and skin tone.

Ease of use Our tester, Antonio Bonacruz, scores each frame on their remote control (where applicable), on-board and on-screen controls.

Standby energy consumption A power meter is used to measure the power consumed by the frames when in standby. 0% means they use more than 2W when in standby; 100% means they use less than 1W.

	Dimensions (cm, H x W x D)	Resolution (pixels)	Contact	Price ($)
ss	24 x 33 x 2	800 x 480	sagem.com.au	297
tte	21 x 30 x 4	800 x 480	kodak.com	329
tte	19 x 26 x 4	800 x 480	kodak.com	279
ss	21 x 30 x 4	1024 x 600	sony.com.au	499
tte	20 x 29 x 4	800 X 480	dlink.com.au	500
tte	23 x 32 x 5	800 x 480	avlabs.net	450
tte	26 x 31 x 3	640 x 480	digiframe.com.au	359
tte	21 x 30 x 3	800 x 480	kodak.com.au	299
ss	23 x 27 x 11	800 x 600	westwell.com.au	399
ss	24 x 30 x 4	640 x 480	shintaro.com.au	246
tte	20 x 29 x 5	1024 x 600	samsung.com/au	399
ss	23 x 27 x 10	800 x 600	abit.com.tw	330
ss	24 x 28 x 4	800 x 600	garagebrands.com.au	299
ss	23 x 32 x 6	1024 x 600	jcmatthew.com	299
tte	25 x 30 x 4	640 x 480	lakopacific.com.au	230

LE NOTES # Newly tested model.

WHAT TO BUY

75% Agfaphoto AF6105MS

PRICE $297

GOOD POINTS
- Programmable sleep mode.

BAD POINTS
- No regular USB port (but does have a USB adapter and mini-USB for computer connection).
- Stand is not adjustable.
- Poor onboard controls.
- No power indicator.

74% Sony DPF-V1000

PRICE $499

GOOD POINTS
- Can output images to a TV.
- Can be wall-mounted.
- Programmable sleep mode.
- Only frame on test to have a power indicator.
- Only on-board controls on test to receive a good rating.
- Only on-screen interface on test to receive a good rating.

BAD POINTS
- Stand is not adjustable.
- No music or video playback (photos only).
- Second-most expensive frame on test.

ABOUT THE REST

Despite having very good picture quality, the newly tested **Kodak** models are not recommended due to their poor ease of use.

The **Kodak** models and the **Samsung** do not come with a remote control.

The **D-Link**, **AV Labs**, **Kodak EasyShare W1020** and **EasyShare W820**, **SmartParts** and **Samsung** models all have wireless capability, a feature that some use better than others.

The **Digiframe** doesn't keep its on-screen menu up long enough for you to consider your options.

Both the **Olin** and **ABit** frames come with inbuilt printers for normal sized photos.

We were disappointed to see very poor standby energy scores on the **JCMatthew** and **SmartParts** frames.

The **D-Link**, **Kaiser Baas** and **Shintaro** frames have the poorest on-board controls, with black labels on black plastic.

CHOICE ONLINE

To find out What to Look For in digital photo frames, log on to **www.choice.com.au/dpf**

STORY CHRIS BARNES

Hot option

A reverse-cycle air conditioner can be the most efficient way to heat a large room.

NUTSHELL

>> On test: seven split-system, reverse-cycle inverter air conditioners with claimed capacities of about 3.5kW for cooling and 4kW-4.9kW for heating, suitable for a large room or a small open-plan living area.

With the huge range of heating options now available – including electric options such as oil column, ceramic, flame effect, panel and fan heaters, plus gas fires and ethanol-fuelled fireplaces – it's easy to forget that a reverse-cycle air conditioner is still one of the most efficient ways to heat a large room or living area. This is particularly true of the recommended Daikin model in CHOICE's latest round of testing (see What to Buy, opposite), which has excellent heating efficiency.

Nevertheless, in Australia's warm climate, air conditioners are more commonly used for cooling, and most of the models on test are efficient in this respect too. Inverter models, such as those on test, are generally more efficient than non-inverters at both heating and cooling, as they vary their output to match room conditions, rather than simply being on (running at full capacity) or off.

For other heating options, look out for our upcoming tests of flued gas log fires and oil column and panel heaters. And if you would like an air conditioner but can't install one (for example, if you're renting), see our report on portable air conditioners in *CHOICE*, November 2009. >

ABOUT THE REST

The **Mitsubishi Electric** scores well in all aspects except standby power consumption.

The **Fujitsu** has the best cooling efficiency we've ever seen in our tests, but is let down by its heating efficiency. We measure this at maximum capacity (nearly 6kW in our test), but normally it won't need to run at full capacity for long, so in typical heating situations its efficiency is likely to be very good (its rated heating capacity is 4.8kW, which is considerably less than its maximum).

The **LG** scores well in all aspects and has the lowest standby power consumption of the models on test.

The **Panasonic** has an excellent airflow range and good heating efficiency, but its cooling efficiency is only OK.

The **Samsung** has good heating efficiency and airflow, but is let down by its cooling efficiency and ease of use.

The **Teco** has good airflow and low standby power consumption, but is the least efficient model on test for both cooling and heating.

PRODUCT	PERFORMANCE										FEATURES	
								MAXIMUM CAPACITY (kW)				
Brand / model (in rank order; indoor / outdoor)	Overall score (%)	Cooling efficiency score (%)	Heating efficiency score (%)	Airflow score (%)	Standby power score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Noise indoor* / outdoor	Measured cooling	Measured heating (at 7°C outdoor temperature)	Rated heating (at 7°C outdoor temperature)	Number of fan speeds **	Fast operation
Daikin FTXS35J2VMA/RXS35JVMA	80	82	95	80	44	75	Medium / quieter	3.7	3.9	4.0	5	✓
Mitsubishi Electric MSZ/MUZ-GE35VA	78	77	84	87	50	76	Quieter / quieter	3.6	3.9	4.0	4	
Fujitsu ASTA12LFC/AOTR12LFC	77	95	65	79	45	76	Medium / quieter	3.5	6.0	4.8	3	
LG R12AWN NB9/UB9	76	72	82	71	89	73	Medium / medium	3.4	3.8	4.0	5	✓
Panasonic CS/CU-E12JKR	76	69	78	96	58	73	Medium / quieter	3.4	4.6	4.9	5	✓
Samsung AQV12VSCN/CX	68	66	75	73	49	69	Quieter / quieter	3.3	3.8	4.0	3	✓
Teco LS/LT1507V	58	46	52	77	75	65	Quieter / quieter	3.8	4.3	4.0	3	✓

USING THE TABLE Scores The overall score is made up of: Cooling efficiency: 35%; Heating efficiency: 25%; Airflow: 20%; Standby power: 10%; Ease of use: 10%. **Cooling efficiency** is weighted than heating efficiency because in Australia, reverse-cycle air conditioners are more often used for cooling than heating. Note we've rescaled the scoring from previous tests, as some new models a more powerful and efficient. (The efficiency scores are not the actual electrical efficiency as used in physics; rather, they are comparative ratings. A model with a 90% score has excellent efficiency scoring 70% is good, and one scoring 45% is comparatively poor.) **Measured capacity** Reverse-cycle air conditioners are sold with rated heating and cooling capacities – you should choose one ba on the cooling and heating capacity required for your room(s). The highest capacity we measured in our test is shown in the table (see How We Test, right). **Annual running costs** We calculate hov each model costs to deliver 1000kWh of full-capacity cooling, 1000kWh of partial-capacity cooling and 2000kWh of heating per year, with the remainder of the year in standby mode (based on

WHAT TO BUY

80% Daikin FTXS35J2VMA / RXS35JVMA

PRICE $1486

GOOD POINTS

- Excellent heating efficiency.
- Very good cooling efficiency.
- Very good airflow range.
- Easy to use.
- Cheapest to run.

BAD POINTS

- Comparatively high standby power consumption.

NEW STAR RATING

From 1 April, new star rating calculations and labels apply to air conditioners and fridges, allowing ratings up to 10 stars – see page 38 for details. Samples of the new air conditioner label can be found at **www.energyrating.gov.au/rac3.html**

	SPECIFICATIONS		COSTS	
Sleep mode	Dimensions of indoor unit (cm. H x W x D)	Contact	Annual running cost ($)	Price ($)
√	30 x 80 x 21	daikin.com.au	170	1486
	30 x 80 x 24	mitsubishielectric.com.au	179	1529
√	30 x 79 x 22	fujitsugeneral.com.au	190	1829
√	29 x 90 x 21	lge.com.au	181	1429
	29 x 87 x 21	panasonic.com.au	187	1439
√	29 x 83 x 20	samsung.com.au	199	1599
√ (A)	27 x 84 x 18	teco.com.au	244	1029

tricity costs of 17c/kWh). Standby costs add only a few dollars a year, but it still be a good idea to unplug your air conditioner (if possible) when it's not in or long periods. **Price** Recommended retail as of March 2010, or the price we in December 2009.
LE NOTES * Lowest fan setting. ** Not including "quiet" and "fast operation" ds. **(A)** No automatic temperature adjustment.

HOW WE TEST

Our test is carried out at a NATA-accredited external lab to our test program and quality requirements. The Australian standard for air conditioners allows manufacturers to fix the compressor speed for inverter models at a certain "rated" capacity; however, CHOICE believes this is unrealistic, as it doesn't reflect the way an inverter air conditioner is used in real life – it will rarely, if ever, operate in such a fixed mode.

Our test method differs from the one manufacturers use for energy label testing (see below), which is why the energy efficiency on the label and our results don't always match. A model that doesn't meet its label claims isn't necessarily inefficient or a poor performer, but you should be able to rely on the energy label for both cooling and heating capacity as well as energy efficiency. In our view, the current tests used by manufacturers don't always show the whole picture.

Efficiency To determine their cooling and heating efficiency (how much power they consume to produce their cooling or heating output), our testers operate the air conditioners continuously at maximum thermostat and fan settings. The results are a worst-case efficiency scenario for inverter models, as most of the time they'll run at lower than their maximum capacity where they are more efficient. The testers use the test room and climate conditions of the Australian standard, measuring and rating the cooling/heating output per kW of power used. In addition, they measure each air conditioner's cooling efficiency at 50% of the measured capacity.

There are two types of energy efficiency label for reverse-cycle air conditioners. The star rating always refers to heating at 7°C (outdoor temperature), which is the temperature at which we test heating for these models. The "all options" label also lists the product's heating capacity at 2°C. The higher the number of stars, the more efficient it is (efficiency is calculated by dividing the output capacity by the input power).

Airflow Our testers measure the indoor airflow (in litres per second) on each fan setting.

Standby power They measure the power consumption when the air conditioner is in standby mode.

Ease of use CHOICE tester, Scott O'Keefe, assesses ease of use of the remote controls, instruction manuals and timers, as well as the ease of removing and refitting the air filters for cleaning.

Noise The testers measure the noise levels of the indoor unit with the fan on the lowest possible setting, and the outdoor unit while it is installed in the test room. The results are comparative only.

CHOICE ONLINE

At **www.choice.com.au** you can read our articles on heating and cooling options, including calculators that help you estimate the heating and cooling capacity required for your room(s), and advice on alternatives to air conditioning. Type "heating options" or "cooling options" in the search box.

BRANDS NOT TESTED

At the time of testing, **Mitsubishi Heavy Industries** had sold out of its ZJX range, and its new ZJX range wasn't available in time. DeLonghi didn't respond to us, so we cannot be sure about ongoing availability of its models. Other brands had no new models in this category.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Energy efficiency Once you've worked out what capacity you need – use the CHOICE cooling and heating calculator (see CHOICE Online, page 49) to determine the right size for your room – compare the star ratings of models of similar capacity; the more stars, the lower the running costs and greenhouse gas emissions. Note that star ratings are different for heating and cooling.

Automatic de-icing If you live in a cold area, frost may build up on the outdoor heat exchanger coils in winter if the air conditioner doesn't have this function (all models on test have this).

Noise A noisy indoor unit may interfere with your conversation or sleep, and most local councils have noise restrictions relating to the use of air conditioners. Check local regulations before you buy, especially if the outdoor unit needs to be installed close to a neighbour's house. All models on test are reasonably quiet.

Fan speeds The fan circulates cooled or heated air around the room. Look for a model with a wide airflow range and multiple fan speeds – from very high, to help the room cool down quickly, to very low, so there's less noise and no unpleasant draught once you have the right temperature.

Operating modes

- **Auto** Automatically chooses the mode required to keep the room at the chosen temperature.
- **Cool** Pumps heat from the inside to the outside.
- **Heat** Pumps heat from the outside to the inside.
- **Dry** Dehumidifies the air, while cooling only slightly.
- **Fan only** Blows air without heating, cooling or drying. This can be useful when all you want is a cooling breeze.

Timer This lets you switch the air conditioner on and/or off automatically at certain times. All models on test have one.

Airflow control Some models have settings with reduced airflow (quiet operation) and/or extra-high airflow (fast or jet operation).

Sleep mode adjusts the temperature in steps so the air conditioner doesn't work as hard (and therefore more quietly) when you're sleeping. You can program how long you want the sleep mode to operate. All but the Mitsubishi Electric and Panasonic models have sleep modes; the Teco has one but without automatic temperature adjustment.

Adjustable or **oscillating louvres** allow the air to be distributed more evenly. Point them up for cool air and down for warm; this can be done via the remote on all models on test. Left and right adjustability helps direct air where it's particularly needed.

Restart delay is a protective feature that prevents the air conditioner from starting up again too soon after being switched off.

Remote control Look for buttons that are well-spaced.

NEW RULES IN SA

New energy efficiency requirements for air conditioners now apply in South Australia. To help reduce electricity consumption, particularly at peak times in summer, the state government has applied higher efficiency requirements (based on the cooling energy efficiency ratio, or EER, of the air conditioner) than those required nationally.

For non-ducted split systems under 4kW, such as the models on test, the national requirement (as of 1 April) is that the EER must be at least 3.33. All the models on test meet this requirement. However, SA has set the minimum EER for these systems a bit higher at 3.4; the Teco, with an EER of 3.34, doesn't meet this. However, most models that meet national EER requirements will also meet the South Australian requirements.

Consumers in SA don't need to take any action, as the onus is on manufacturers and retailers to sell compliant models. For now, they can sell old, non-compliant models to clear their stock, but from 1 July all air conditioners sold in SA must meet the new requirements. CHOICE supports moves towards better efficiency, although state-based regulations such as those in SA and Queensland (see *CHOICE*, October 2009) can complicate business for national distributors and retailers.

For details of the South Australian requirements, go to www.dtei.sa.gov.au and search for "air conditioners".

STORY REBECCA GATTO

Browning reactions

Create a variety of toasty treats with these four-slice toasters.

NUTSHELL

>> 19 four-slice toasters on test, ranging from $22 to $200.

>> Never mind the fancy designs and features – can the toaster perform its basic job?

Toasters have really progressed from the days of putting in a slice of bread and waiting a couple of minutes for toast to pop up. Now they feature reheat and frozen bread settings, not to mention dual controls, extra lift and the capacity to toast a range of bread varieties as well as crumpets and bagels. They come in a range of colours and sizes to suit individual needs and are designed to be on display in kitchens. But while you can pay top price for a toaster, how can you be sure it will perform its most important function – toasting bread – well?

WHAT TO BUY

BEST BUY

Kambrook Essentials 4-Slice Toaster KT60	$45
Breville Emporia Toaster CT45B	$110
Breville Freestyle Toaster BT905	$40
Breville ikon BTA550	$110

HOW WE TEST

Performance Our tester, Peter Horvath, uses fresh white bread to conduct all the performance tests.

- **Browning** He first determines the optimum browning setting, and then completes four toasting cycles with 30 seconds between each run. He assesses the evenness across the face of each slice, consistency between runs, evenness of colour of each slice and the average toast colour.
- **Single slice** He observes whether the toaster can brown a single slice of bread to the desired level.
- **Frozen bread** He uses bread slices directly out of the freezer and completes two toasting cycles, with 30 seconds between each run, and again assesses the evenness and consistency between runs.

Ease of use He assesses how easy the controls are to use, specifically reading and adjusting the browning control. He also looks at ease of cleaning the exterior surfaces and crumb removal.

Safety All toasters passed our electrical safety test.

choice shopper

For the best deal, call CHOICE Shopper, 1300 360 655, with the model name and number, the price you want to beat and your CHOICE personal subscriber number. The full range of models on test may not be available in all states.

CHOICE tested 19 four-slice toasters that range in price from $22 to $200, assessing their basic functions, how evenly they toast bread, their consistency in producing the desired colour cycle after cycle and their ability to toast a single slice of bread as well as frozen bread. We also looked at toasting time and key safety features. We use white bread in our tests, which allows a more direct comparative analysis of the toasters.

Four-slice toasters are great for families or just hungry folk needing to toast multiple slices at once. Initially, you'll need to experiment with the browning control to find the level that suits your taste. Once you've selected the setting, the toaster should be able to maintain the same level of brownness over consecutive cycles of toasting.

Toasted features

The Kambrook Essentials 4-Slice Toaster KT60 is the standout performer and our Best Buy. It may not be the most stylish toaster on test, and it's on the longer end for toasting time, but its performance clearly sets it apart from the rest. It's the only model on test to achieve an excellent score for browning evenly across both sides of bread, and in terms of value for money it has a reasonable price tag.

The most expensive toaster on test, the Breville Professional 800 Collection BTA840, has the looks and all the features but is only OK for performance. At the bottom of the list is one of the cheapest models on test, the Maxim, which even on its maximum browning setting is unable to toast bread properly, leaving large areas underdone on both sides.

Features such as reheat and defrost for frozen bread are now common, and a particularly useful feature of four-slice toasters is dual controls. These allow you to carry out two separate toasting cycles, and are useful if you're using two different varieties of bread. One model with dual controls, the Breville Emporia Toaster CT45B, made our recommended list (page 52). Another valuable feature is extra height lift, whereby you pull a lever to lift the carriage – making the toast easy to remove once the cycle is finished. This is a useful safety feature, as you can get the bread out of the toaster without bringing your fingers too close to the hot surface and elements. >

The Kambrook Essentials 4-Slice Toaster is both our Best Buy and the only very good toaster on test

WHAT TO BUY

BEST BUY

83% Kambrook Essentials 4-Slice Toaster KT60

PRICE $45

GOOD POINTS

- Excellent at browning evenly.
- Very good at producing the same toast colour cycle after cycle.
- Very good at toasting frozen bread.
- Exterior is very easy to clean.
- Very good controls.

BAD POINTS

- None to mention.

71% Breville Emporia Toaster CT45B

PRICE $110

GOOD POINTS

- Good at browning evenly.
- Good at toasting frozen bread.
- Very easy to clean the crumb trays.
- Very good dual controls.

BAD POINTS

- Only OK at producing the same toast colour cycle after cycle.

PRODUCT	PERFORMANCE				FEATURES						SPECIFICATIONS		
Brand / model (in rank order)	Overall score (%)	Performance score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Measured toasting time (min:sec)	Cord storage	Reheat setting	Frozen bread setting	Dual carriage control	Separate temperature control	Height-lift carriage	Number of slots	Dimensions (cm, L x W x H)	Bread carriage dimensions (mm, L x W x H)
Kambrook Essentials 4-Slice Toaster KT60	83	84	80	4:00	✓	✓	✓			✓	2	39 x 16 x 18	255 x 25 x 1
Breville Emporia Toaster CT45B	71	67	80	2:50	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	4	35 x 28 x 21	145 x 30 x 1
Breville Freestyle Toaster BT905	71	69	76	4:20	✓	✓	✓			✓	2	40 x 16 x 19	255 x 25 x 1
Breville ikon BTA550	71	70	74	2:50	✓	✓	✓			✓	2	42 x 21 x 20	257 x 35 x 1
Russell Hobbs Satin Four Slice Toaster 9476	69	69	70	3:40	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	4	31 x 25 x 21	168 x 20 x 1
Bellini 4 Slice Toaster BTT510	68	64	78	3:00	✓	✓				✓	4	33 x 26 x 14	140 x 30 x 1
Sunbeam Café Series TA9400	68	64	76	2:50	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	4	35 x 26 x 21	145 x 30 x 1
Sunbeam Toastum 4 TA6420	68	64	76	3:00	✓		✓			✓	2	40 x 17 x 20	250 x 30 x 1
Tefal Privilege TL6260	66	59	82	2:20	✓	✓	✓			✓	2	40 x 19 x 19	255 x 30 x 1
Breville Professional 800 Collection BTA840	65	59	78	2:40	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		4	28 x 30 x 20	140 x 35 x 1
Sunbeam Quantum Thick & Thin 4 TA4400	62	54	82	2:20	✓	✓	✓			✓	2	40 x 17 x 19	260 x 25 x 1
Homemaker 4 Slice Stainless Steel Toaster HMDHT-400	59	57	62	3:10	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		4	33 x 30 x 20	135 x 37 x 1
DeLonghi Toaster CTH4003	58	49	80	2:20	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	4	31 x 31 x 22	140 x 35 x 1
Woolworths Essentials 4 Slice Toaster KT-6001/4	58	57	60	4:00		✓	✓				2	40 x 17 x 19	250 x 15 x 1
Kenwood Toaster OWTT580005	57	52	70	3:30	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	4	30 x 30 x 20	140 x 30 x 1
Tefal Avanti Deluxe Toaster TT744170 (A)	50	37	80	3:10	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	4	30 x 29 x 24	130 x 30 x 1
Sunbeam Quantum 4 TA3420	49	42	66	2:30	✓		✓			✓	2	40 x 17 x 19	245 x 25 x 1
Tiffany Four Slice Cool Touch Toaster TAT48	47	41	60	2:50		✓	✓				2	40 x 17 x 20	250 x 20 x 1
Maxim Four-up Family Toaster AT804	38	32	52	3:30							2	36 x 12 x 16	250 x 20 x 1

USING THE TABLE **Scores** The overall score is made up of: Performance: 70% (Evenness of browning: 35%, Repeatability of colour: 35%, Frozen bread: 15%, Single slice: 15%); Ease of use: 30% (Control 40%, Cleaning exterior: 30%, Crumb removal/cleaning: 30%). **Measured toasting time** is the time it takes to toast the first four slices of bread, starting from a cold toaster, rounded to the nearest 10 seconds. **Features** See What to Look For, right. **Dimensions** are rounded to the nearest cm. **Price** Recommended retail, as of March 2010, except those marked with a **(B)** (see right).

71% Breville Freestyle Toaster BT905

PRICE $40

GOOD POINTS

- Good at producing the same toast colour cycle after cycle.
- Good at browning evenly.
- Good at toasting frozen bread.
- Very easy to clean the crumb tray.

BAD POINTS

- None to mention.

71% Breville ikon BTA550

PRICE $110

GOOD POINTS

- Good at producing the same toast colour cycle after cycle.
- Good at browning evenly.
- Good at toasting frozen bread.
- Very good controls.

BAD POINTS

- None to mention.

Look for an easy-to-clean exterior with no crevices or sharp edges that could scratch your benchtop when moving

	Price ($)
brook.com.au	45
ille.com.au	110
ille.com.au	40
ille.com.au	110
n.com.au	90
at.com.au	80 (B)
eam.com.au	199
eam.com.au	90
.com.au	90
ille.com.au	200
eam.com.au	45
rt.com.au	40 (B)
nghi.com.au	169
lworths.com.au	22 (B)
wood-australia.com	70
.com.au	110
eam.com.au	50
ontrol.com.au	30 (B)
imhousewares.com	26 (B)

LE NOTES (A) Discontinued; replaced il 2010 by a 'face-lifted' version. **(B)** mmended retail, as of November 2009.

ABOUT THE REST

All other toasters on test range from OK to poor.

The carriage lever doesn't come up high enough on the **Sunbeam Toastum 4 TA6420**, making it difficult to remove bread from the toaster.

The **Sunbeam Quantum Thick & Thin 4 TA4400** is the quickest for toasting four slices of bread. However, it only scores borderline for even browning and very poor for toasting frozen bread.

The **Woolworths Essentials** and **Tiffany** toasters don't have self-centering mechanisms, so thicker slices of bread may get caught in the wire frame.

The wall housing on the **Maxim** reaches dangerously hot temperatures. Also, its crumb tray has very sharp edges and can only be opened with a screwdriver.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

The most important feature of a toaster is its ability to toast bread. It should toast bread evenly on both sides and produce the same result consistently over several runs. It should also allow for levels of browning to be adjusted to suit individual tastes. The toaster should be able to cope with a sudden stop in the toasting cycle without throwing bread out onto the bench.

Other features to consider are:

Easy-to-remove crumb tray with no sharp edges. It should be easy to slide out or flip down and insert after emptying, as well as have no places for crumbs to accumulate in the toaster over time. The crumb tray should be emptied and cleaned frequently to avoid build-up and insects. As well as emptying the tray, you can also shake the toaster upside down for a more thorough clean.

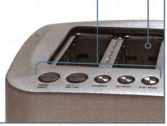
Easy-to-clean exterior with no crevices where dirt can be trapped, and no sharp edges that could scratch the user or benchtop when moving. While stainless steel may look more attractive, it often requires more effort to clean than a plastic exterior.

Height-lift carriage allows you to raise smaller items above the toaster slots.

Temperature of the exterior during toasting should remain cool enough to touch, and not exceed 60°C.

Toasting chamber should be wide and long enough to insert and remove a variety of bread shapes and sizes. A long-slot toaster is the way to go if you prefer to toast long slices of bread; if you often toast crumpets and muffins, a side-by-side slot toaster may be more suitable.

Controls should be easy to read and operate. They should also be away from hot areas for safe access.



STORY MATTHEW STEEN

TV on demand

A DVR can be a smart way to follow your own viewing schedule – not the networks'.

NUTSHELL

>> On test: 13 digital video recorders, priced from $499 to $1099.

>> Better reception results than our last test, but some DVRs are much easier to use than others.

Digital video recorders (DVRs) are a great way to record TV without the need for optical media such as DVDs. Essentially, they record programs to a hard disc drive (HDD) like the one in your computer; the size of the HDD determines how much they can record.

The DVRs on test incorporate two high definition tuners – four in the case of the Foxtel iQ2 – which in most cases allow you to record two channels while watching a third.

Finding a DVR a joy to use will come down to its ease of use. The electronic program guide (EPG), on-board controls, on-screen display and remote control all impact on their intuitiveness. Most of the models on test are OK or good to use, requiring only a little getting used to.

Better than live

As well as recording programs, DVRs can also pause live TV. Because the DVR is recording automatically for up to an hour, it keeps a live copy on the HDD of the channel you're watching. So if you press pause or come into a movie 10 minutes in and the DVR is already on and "buffering" for that amount of time, >

choice shopper

For the best deal, call CHOICE Shopper, 1300 360 655, with the model name and number, the price you want to beat and your CHOICE personal subscriber number. The full range of models on test may not be available in all states.

PRODUCT	PERFORMANCE					FEATURES							
Brand / model (in rank order)	Overall score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Reception score (%)	Standby energy score (%)	Standby energy use (W)	External storage support	Record directly to external storage	Freeview enabled	USB ports (Front / Rear)	Ethernet port	Memory card reader	S-video output
Strong SRT 5492	77	65	90	80	0.7	USB	✓		1 / 1	✓		✓
Topfield TF7100HD Plus	75	66	85	80	0.6	USB, Ethernet, e-SATA	✓		1 / 1	✓ (B)		
Beyonwiz FV-L1500	71	72	88	0	4.6	USB, Ethernet		✓	1 / 1	✓	✓	✓
DGTec DG-FV500PVR	70	58	78	100	0.5	USB		✓	- / 1	✓		
Foxtel iQ2	70	61	100	0	22.1				1 / 1	✓		✓
Teac HDR2500T	70	64	74	80	0.6	USB	✓		1 / -			
Topfield TRF7150 (A)	70	56	79	100	0.4	USB		✓	1 / -	✓		✓
DGTec DG-HD500PVR	69	61	77	80	0.6	USB			- / 1			
Tivo TCD663160	67	62	90	0	23.4	e-SATA	✓		- / 2	✓		✓
Sony PlayTV via PS3	65	46	81	100	0.5	USB			2 / -	✓		
Homecast HT8200	63	64	78	0	18.1	USB, Ethernet		✓	1 / 3	✓ (B)		✓
DigitalView DVR810-320	62	72	66	0	5.0				- / 1			✓
Beyonwiz DP-S1 (A)	49	68	37	0	4.5	USB, Ethernet, W-LAN			1 / 1	✓	✓	✓

USING THE TABLE **Scores** The overall score is made up of: Ease of use: 50%; Reception: 40%; Standby energy score: 10%. **Standby energy use** details (in Watts per h how much energy the DVR uses when in standby mode. **Features** See What to Look For, page 56. **Freeview** CHOICE's opinion on Freeview is not favourable, given the redu in functionality for those DVRs with Freeview enabled. See our Freeview article online at **www.choice.com.au/freeview**. **Annual running cost** is based on five hours o

WHAT TO BUY

77% Strong SRT 5492

PRICE $599

GOOD POINTS

- Excellent reception.
- HDMI output.
- Ethernet port.

BAD POINTS

- Does not name recorded programs.
- Cannot edit recordings with accuracy.

75% Topfield TF7100HD Plus

PRICE $749

GOOD POINTS

- Easy to split a recording into two.
- Very good reception.
- HDMI output.
- Ethernet port.

BAD POINTS

- Does not protect a recording by default.
- Symbols on remote control are not easy to read.
- Playback and menu navigation are not available via front panel.

GLOSSARY

DVR: Digital video recorder.
DVD HDD recorder: A DVR with a DVD recorder / player in it as well. This means you can record directly to DVD.
PVR: A personal video recorder is the same as a DVR.

	SPECIFICATIONS					COSTS	
	Dimensions (cm, H x W x D)	Weight (kg)	Hard disk drive capacity (GB)	Number of digital tuners	Contact	Annual running cost ($)	Price ($)
20+ years	7 x 34 x 28	2.6	500	2 x HD	strong-technologies.com	7	599
20+ years	7 x 43 x 28	3.2	320	2 x HD	itopfield.com.au	8	749
20+ years	7 x 39 x 31	3.5	500	2 x HD	beyonwiz.com.au	13	549
20+ years	7 x 36 x 28	2.9	500	2 x HD	dgtec.com.au	7	699
7 days	7 x 41 x 30	3.5	320	4 x cable / satellite	hd.foxtel.com.au	34	(C)
20+ years	7 x 36 x 28	3	500	2 x HD	teac.com.au	7	699
20+ years	7 x 39 x 28	3.2	500	2 x HD	itopfield.com.au	7	799
20+ years	7 x 36 x 26	2.8	500	2 x HD	dgtec.com.au	7	549
ns	9 x 42 x 34	4	190	2 x HD	tivo.com.au	36	599
14 days	4 x 14 x 7	0.1	120	2 x HD	au.playstation.com	24	170 (D)
1 year	7 x 36 x 28	2.9	500	2 x HD	homecastaustralia.com.au	29	499
30 days	10 x 43 x 30	4.1	320	2 x HD	digitalview.com.au	13	1099
720+ years	7 x 43 x 35	4.7	200	2 x HD	beyonwiz.com.au	15	799

9 hours of standby power per day. **Price** Recommended retail, as of February 2010. **TABLE NOTES ns** Not stated. iscontinued, but may still be available in some stores. **(B)** For copy only. **(C)** Priced from $40 per month plus $10 per h for the HD box. **(D)** Price does not include cost of PS3.

ABOUT THE REST

The **Beyonwiz FV-L1500** is a good DVR overall but uses more standby energy than the recommended models.

The **Foxtel**, **Homecast** and **TiVo** DVRs have very poor standby energy scores, whereas the **Sony PlayTV** (connected to the PS3), **DGTec DG-FV500PVR** and **Topfield TRF7150** have excellent standby energy scores.

The **Sony PlayTV** is the only DVR on test that cannot record to two channels at the same time – see First Look, *CHOICE* February 2010, for more.

The **DigitalView** is OK overall, but is overly expensive with only a 320GB HDD (larger capacities are available for a steeper price). Along with the **Teac** and **DGTec DG-HD500PVR**, it also has no ethernet connection for copying or connecting to the internet.

Foxtel gets 100% for reception score, but because it gets its reception from cable rather than the aerial, it's not as subject to the same variety of conditions as other products on test.

We cannot recommend the **Beyonwiz DP-S1** due to its poor reception.

Although small, most DVRs standby energy adds up over time – so bear it in mind when shopping around

< you can rewind and watch the movie from the beginning. When you change channels, the DVR will start buffering the new channel. Some DVRs, such as the TiVo, allow you to search for TV shows via its EPG, making recording much easier.

Power hungry

The TiVo, Foxtel iQ2 and Homecast DVRs use about 20W when on standby. Standby energy, although small in each appliance, adds up over time, so bear this in mind when shopping around.

Recording Foxtel

You would expect to be able to record anything that gets displayed on your TV, but unfortunately this is not the case. While all of the DVRs on test record free-to-air TV, to record Foxtel to a DVR you need an analog input connection – which none of the DVRs have. In our last test, the Beyonwiz DP-P2 had this ability, but it's since been discontinued. For now, the Foxtel IQ2 is the only DVR you can record Foxtel TV on. There are alternatives, such as some DVD hard disc recorders from our last test – see *CHOICE* October 2009 – and VCRs. ■

HOW WE TEST

Ease of use Our tester, James Thomson, looks for an auto-tuning system that is informative and simple to use. He makes instant recordings and checks the menus for ease of understanding, navigation and clarity. He also plays back recordings to check the quality and range of functions. He assesses the remote control for common functions; looks at the front panel controls to see if the machine can perform various tasks without using the remote control; and looks at the quality of information conveyed via the front panel display.

Long program, dual-tuner timer recording is tested by programming to record two one-hour programs with a third program overlapping them. After the end of the third event, he checks to see which events were successfully recorded on the internal hard drive.

Reception Each model is tested to determine the relative performance of its HD tuners. The DVRs are initially provided with a perfect digital TV reception signal. Various forms of interference are then introduced to replicate problems likely to be accounted, such as aeroplanes, wireless home networks or a microwave operating nearby.

A recording made to the internal HDD is played back and compared with a digital TV broadcast to determine whether any variation in quality is noticeable. All models include the latest firmware upgrades available at the time of testing.

Standby power James connects the DVRs to a regulated power supply and power meter, and records standby energy consumption. Products that don't achieve a standby power rating of 1W as required by Minimum Energy Performance Standards (to be introduced by 2012) score 0%, even if they meet the more lenient current requirements.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

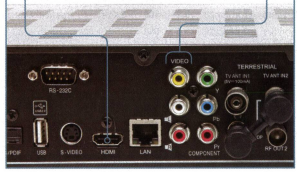
External storage support means the DVR will recognise when external memory, such as a USB memory key or other form of mass storage, is attached. If you cannot record directly to it (see below) you'll still be able to copy from your DVR storage to the external storage.

Direct recording to an external drive is a particularly handy feature if you wish to store many of the shows you have recorded for future viewing.

Timeshift All models on test incorporate a timeshift feature. This allows you to press the pause button and stop watching the show, and the DVR will continue to record while you are away.

HDMI is an all-digital connection for both video and sound in one cable; all DVRs on test have an HDMI connection. TOSLINK and digital coaxial cable delivers digital audio and provides support for audio features such as Dolby surround sound and Dolby True Sound (DTS).

Video connections Your DVR should have connections that match the ones on your TV and any other device you wish to connect. Apart from SCART and HDMI, all connections require separate audio links. Composite and S-Video are the lowest video quality, with Component being the highest quality analog video option available.



STORY DAVID OAKENFULL

Pizza performance

We reveal which brands and chains offer the healthiest – and tastiest – pizzas.

NUTSHELL

- >> Pizzas with vegetarian, seafood or chicken-based toppings generally have the least saturated fat and salt.
- >> The tastiest pizzas were takeaways from the big chains. Our experts were seriously unimpressed by frozen pizzas you heat at home.

Pizzas get a bad press from nutrition experts. A pizza can deliver an entire day's allowance of saturated fat and salt in just one meal, and pizzas can pack in plenty of kilojoules – definitely not good if you're watching your waistline. At the same time, though, a good pizza is truly delicious, so it's not surprising they're one of Australia's favourite foods.

Fortunately for pizza lovers, they're not all created equal. CHOICE compared more than 190 brands and flavours available nationally from supermarkets (chilled or frozen) or from takeaway chains. We found some big differences in nutritional value – and in value for money. We also asked three experts (see below) to rate the pizzas we selected as the healthiest from each of the major brands. While none was outstanding, the tastiest pizzas came from the three big takeaway chains, Pizza Hut, Domino's and Eagle Boys. An Aldi chilled pizza that you cook at home also rated well.

This isn't to say your local Italian restaurant doesn't have much better pizzas than any of these – but unfortunately we couldn't include individual restaurants in our test as their pizzas are too variable, whereas the chains make pizzas to a standard formula.

Healthier choices

If pizza is more than an occasional treat in your household, it's a good idea to look for the healthier brands and toppings. While none of the pizzas we compared could be considered a truly healthy choice, there are several that aren't too bad nutritionally. Some brands (Crust Healthier Choice, Papa Giuseppi's Tasty Balance) produce pizzas low enough in saturated fat and sodium to get a Heart Foundation Tick. See the table, page 59, for the healthiest pizzas produced by each of the major brands; for the full list, and to see how your favourites compare, go to **www.choice.com.au/pizzas**.

Factors to consider for a healthier pizza are:

- **Energy** Pizzas are energy-dense – they can pack many kilojoules into one modest serving. Even the least fattening pizza we found, Crust Healthier Choice Roast Vegetable, delivers 740kJ per 100g, which compares with only about 430kJ/100g for spaghetti bolognaise. So if you're watching your weight, look for pizzas with lower energy density (measured as kJ/100g).
- **Saturated fat** Too much saturated fat is a major cause of heart disease, and pizzas often have far too much of it. Avoid those with more than 5g of saturated fat per 100g; in the food traffic light system that CHOICE advocates, this amount would trigger a red light, meaning the pizza is too high in saturated fat to be anything more than an occasional treat (amber is OK – see table, page 59).
- **Sodium** Too much salt (sodium chloride) increases your risk of stroke. Avoiding pizzas with more than about 600mg of sodium per 100g – the red light trigger – is unfortunately easier said than done, as 29% of the pizzas in our survey contain at least this much sodium. The saltiest, Domino's Classic Crust Toni Pepperoni, has a massive 938mg of sodium per 100g. >

MEET THE EXPERTS

Many thanks to our three experts, all of whom trained in Italy and own and run Italian restaurants in Sydney. **George Pompei** (left), Pompei's Gelateria and Pizzeria, 126 Roscoe Street, Bondi Beach. **Ilario Ventolini** (middle), Moretti Caffé, 47 Norton Street, Leichhardt. **Ben Riccio** (right), Napoli in Bocca Restaurant, 73 Dalhousie Street, Haberfield.

In most brands, vegetarian, seafood and chicken-based toppings are the healthiest choice of pizza

WHAT TO BUY

Energy 5502kJ
Size 600g
Saturated fat 24g
Total fat 42g
Sodium 2430mg

PIZZA HUT VEGGIE SUPREME (PERFECTO CRUST)
Price $7.95
Tasters' comments: "Fresh appearance, crisp crust, not smothered in cheese."

Energy 1484kJ
Size 298g
Saturated fat 5.4g
Total fat 9.5g
Sodium 718mg

DOMINO'S GOOD CHOICE CHICKEN, TOMATO & OREGANO CIABATTA
Price $7.95
Tasters' comments: "Best of the lot but too much topping."

Pizza brands to look for

< Domino's Good Choice and the Crust Healthier Choice range of pizzas are the healthiest overall (but Crust have relatively few outlets and only in the eastern states, so we haven't included them in our table). Black & Gold, Home Brand, Mama Mia (Aldi) and Woolworths Deliexpress are only a little worse for saturated fat; Remano (Aldi), Home Brand, Papa Giuseppi's, Fresh Approach (Aldi) and McCain have less sodium than other brands (but a lot more than Crust Healthier Choice). At the other extreme, Pizza Hut's pizzas are the unhealthiest overall (especially their Thin'n Crispy range), averaging significantly more saturated fat, sodium and kilojoules than other brands.

CHOICE CHAMPION PIZZA

Our experts awarded this easy homemade pizza a score of 80%, well above any of the bought pizzas (and without knowing it was homemade).

- **Crust** Use Lebanese or pita bread or make your own, using a bread-maker or following the recipe we used at **www.choice.com.au/pizzas**.
- **Sauce** Combine one can of chopped tomatoes, two tablespoons of olive oil, one crushed garlic clove and one teaspoon of dried oregano (makes enough for two pizzas). Add salt and pepper to taste – but check first, as some brands of canned tomatoes already have salt added.
- **Topping** Top with ¾ cup Mozzarella cheese, one slice of prosciutto (chopped), five button mushrooms (sliced) and two basil leaves (torn).
- **Preheat oven to 240°** Bake your pizza for 10-15 minutes, until the crust is crisp and the topping golden brown.

Toppings and crusts

In most brands, vegetarian, seafood and chicken-based toppings have lower energy densities than other flavours, as well as less saturated fat and salt.

Thin crusts are not the healthy option you might think. The kilojoules, saturated fat and sodium come mostly from the topping, so the higher the ratio of crust to topping, the healthier the pizza. On average, we found pan pizzas and those with regular crusts are healthier than their thin-crust equivalents. But Pizza Hut's Stuffed Crust pizzas, where the crust contains extra cheese, are a nutritional disaster, with far too much saturated fat and sodium.

Which pizzas taste best?

However healthy a pizza may be, it's the taste that really matters. Our expert tasters (see Meet the Experts, page 57) rated the healthiest pizzas from each of the major brands (see the table, right, for details). While they didn't consider any to be outstanding, four led the pack for flavour and appearance (see What to Buy, above) – three of which were takeaways from the each of the big chains and the fourth a chilled pizza from Aldi that you cook yourself.

All brands of frozen pizza rated poorly. The experts described them as having poor quality ingredients and very sweet and doughy. And with the exception of Aldi's Fresh Approach Calabrese, the tasters didn't rate the more expensive chilled pizzas very highly either.

Value for money?

The supermarket generic brands of frozen pizza are about half the price of most others. The other, more expensive brands of frozen pizza are just not worth the extra money. Pizzas from the takeaway chains taste

Energy 4893kJ
Size 505g
Saturated fat 24.2g
Total fat 43.4g
Sodium 1995mg

FRESH APPROACH CALABRESE (ALDI)
Price $6.99
Tasters' comments: "Dough a bit oily, but good taste; restrained, simple topping, but sweet."

Energy 4942kJ
Size 624g
Saturated fat 13.1g
Total fat 25.6g
Sodium 2390mg

EAGLE BOYS ZESTY LEMON AND PRAWN (MID-BASE CRUST)
Price $9.95
Tasters' comments: "Crust is thin and well-cooked but a little too sweet; a little too much cheese and quite bland."

better and are still relatively cheap, although Domino's Good Choice range come in at $7.95 each for a pizza that's only just big enough for one person. Chilled pizzas are not significantly cheaper than takeaways, and, with the exception of Aldi's Fresh Approach Calabrese, don't taste as good – but you can keep them in the fridge for a few days, so they can be more convenient, not to mention cheaper, than ordering a pick-up or delivery from a pizza chain (particularly if you order online).

For best value and taste, try making your own pizza by following our CHOICE Champion Pizza recipe (opposite). The tasters scored this pizza well above any of the bought ones, and it only costs about $3.40 for one pizza. ■

HOW WE TEST

We couldn't taste test all 291 pizzas, so we picked the healthiest choice from each of the major brands. The chain pizzas were delivered or picked up within 30 minutes of being tasted; the frozen and chilled pizzas were bought the day before. For comparison, we also included a healthy pizza that's quick and easy to make at home (see CHOICE Champion Pizza, opposite). Three experts rated the pizzas for taste and appearance, taking into account factors such as the quality of the crust and ingredients and whether the pizza is baked evenly.

CHOICE's homemade Champion Pizza scored above all the bought ones, and only costs about $3.40 to make one pizza

HEALTHIEST PIZZAS

Brand (ranked by taste score)	Taste score (%)	Type	NUTRIENTS PER 100g			Price per 100g ($)
			Energy (kJ)	Saturated fat (g)	Sodium (mg)	
Pizza Hut Veggie Supreme Perfecto Crust	56	Chain	917	4.0 ▲	405 ▲	1.33
Domino's Good Choice Chicken, Tomato & Oregano Ciabatta	55	Chain	498	1.8 ▲	241 ▲	2.67
Fresh Approach Calabrese (Aldi)	55	Chilled	969	4.8 ▲	395 ▲	1.38
Eagle Boys Zesty Lemon & Prawn	52	Chain	792	2.1 ▲	383 ▲	1.59
Coles Supreme	41	Chilled	942	4.6 ▲	500 ▲	1.38
Woolworths Deliexpress No. 3 Chicken & Bacon	35	Chilled	824	3.2 ▲	540 ▲	0.85
McCain Supreme	33	Frozen	908	3.3 ▲	390 ▲	1.25
Papa Giuseppi's Tasty Balance Tropical Supremo (A)	32	Frozen	930	1.9 ▲	305 ▲	1.15
Home Brand Supreme	31	Frozen	948	2.1 ▲	370 ▲	0.65
Black & Gold Supreme	27	Frozen	907	2.6 ▲	330 ▲	0.79
Coles Smart Buy Supreme	27	Frozen	1000	4.2 ▲	410 ▲	0.65

USING THE TABLE Price Based on prices paid in Sydney in January 2010. **TABLE NOTES (A)** Heart Foundation Tick.

NUMBER CRUNCH

10.5
The percentage of saturated fat (%) in a Domino's Classic Crust Toni Pepperoni pizza.

1.8
The percentage of saturated fat (%) in a Domino's Good Choice Chicken, Tomato and Oregano Ciabatta pizza.

STORY KATE BROWNE

Trolley psychology

CHOICE unlocks the psychological secrets of the supermarket and shows you how to avoid spending more than you mean to.

NUTSHELL

>> Supermarkets spend millions researching consumer behaviour and psychology to get you to buy more in their stores.

>> Shopping alone and sticking to a list are two simple ways to avoid overspending.

You run into the supermarket only intending to buy a couple of essentials – but before you know it, you've collected a trolley full of groceries and you're queued up at the register. Sound familiar? This might seem accidental, but make no mistake: it's all part of the grand marketing plan of supermarket retailers.

Supermarkets spend millions of dollars researching consumer behaviour in order to develop tactics to compel you to buy more in their stores. Their tricks are varied – from positioning specials at the end of the aisle, placing milk and bread at the back of the store and lollies and magazines at the checkout – but all are designed to make you spend more than you planned.

CHOICE takes a look at some of the more common tricks of "trolleyology" to help avoid blowing the budget next time you grab your shopping trolley.

The path more travelled

Have you ever noticed that when you walk into a shop, you tend to look over or veer to the right? Consumer psychologists say this is a classic biological trait, linked to most people's preference for using their right hand. While it's something we tend to do in shops as well as places such as museums and art galleries, supermarkets really capitalise on this. It's to the right where you'll see temporary displays of products designed to grab your attention and entice you to make a snap purchase (see illustration, page 63). This can be anything from fresh flowers and chocolates to umbrellas if it's been raining.

Consumer psychologist and Senior Lecturer at Deakin University, Dr. Paul Harrison, says the location of a store's entry point has a significant effect on how people shop, and even how much they spend. "Right-hand side entries favour anti-clockwise movement through the shop, while left-hand side entries favour clockwise patterns. Research in the US has shown that shoppers who travel in an anti-clockwise direction will spend, on average, two dollars more per trip than clockwise shoppers."

Contrary to popular belief, once we're in the store most of us don't weave up and down the aisles in an orderly way. Research conducted on shopper movement patterns in-store using GPS trackers suggests people travel to some aisles only, and rarely in a systematic up-and-down pattern. Even longer, planned shopping trips follow this pattern.

The most common path to travel in-store is around the outside perimeter, dipping in and out of the aisles as needed. As a result, the ends of each aisle are the most profitable part of the store. Product manufacturers pay big dollars to place their products there to grab shoppers' attention, and it's usually familiar brands that provide the greatest profit margin. These end-of-aisle displays also act as a "welcome mat", tempting shoppers to venture further down to the products positioned in the middle of the aisle that receive less attention.

Like a marketplace

When you enter a big supermarket, the most noticeable section of the store is the fresh fruit and vegetable area. Although it's not logical to have squashable fruit and veggies as the first items to pack into your trolley, this department is deliberately located to give the supermarket a positive image of being fresh and healthy.

People who use the fresh food areas also tend to spend more money in the store overall – another reason why it's

usually placed at the beginning of the supermarket experience. Harrison says this area is designed to make shoppers feel relaxed and create a sense of emotional involvement for shoppers.

Many supermarkets micro-manage the various fresh food sections of the shop. Instead of approaching the shop as a single entity, they separate areas into particular zones and have developed different marketing plans for each of these areas. These anchor departments usually include fresh fruit and vegetables, meat, dairy, and the bakery – and all are designed to give shoppers a sense of individual difference.

Research indicates consumers will spend more time in the supermarket because of these different zones. By setting up different "marketplace" areas, our minds are tricked into thinking we've visited several different stores rather than a single big shop. Each of these areas has different lighting, floor coverings and sometimes individual counters for service (such as a deli). "It's all about creating a market-like feel," says Harrison. "Areas such as the bakery, apart from smelling good, give the impression the supermarket is trustworthy; it's like they're saying, 'you can trust us because we make stuff'."

The long and the short

Ever walked into a big supermarket just to buy some bread and milk and found yourself leaving with a basket of additional items? A classic retailing trick is to locate the milk and bread at the very back of the store (often at either end) to encourage short-term shoppers to walk right through the shop and be tempted by other, more expensive products along the way.

However, Harrison says this tactic is now being seen by psychologists and retail designers as inefficient, although most supermarkets still believe it can encourage impulse purchases. Recent research has shown it's actually more efficient to have these products toward the front of the store, and place the other impulse products close by. "Smart supermarkets are putting a small area with a limited selection of bread and milk at the front of the shop for those shoppers whose motives won't be modified, and then having a more extensive selection of bread and milk at the back."

Either way, you'll probably still buy more than you intended. Research published in the *Journal of Consumer Behaviour* last year challenges the notion that major trips to the supermarket are the best opportunities to create unplanned purchases. This research, conducted by the Stockholm School of Economics found those little fill-in trips we take during the week will result in many unplanned purchases, and that on average, unplanned purchases will account for a greater share of the total bill for a fill-in rather than a major trip.

You're very special

According to Harrison, no matter what we might like to think it's human nature to be attracted to a bargain. "Although we think we know we're being manipulated, we tend to fall for it anyway." Even the word "special" plays on our subconscious. "Just the word sets off a psychological process in your mind where if something is labelled 'special' we think it must be good. It also feeds into a theory known as the scarcity effect. This is where we think that if it's on special, then it must only be available at this shop or for a short time, and we afford it more value than the products around it."

Emotional and confusing

Confusion and emotional involvement will have an effect on how long a person spends in front of a particular area in the supermarket. You might, for example, find consumers spending a long time in front of the coffee selection area. Similarly, baby food and pet food purchases take longer because of emotional involvement.

Soups and dressings often involve long buy times because of the sometimes-confusing variety of options on offer. As a result, long buy-time products are placed where shoppers will not feel hurried, crowded or that they're getting in the way of other customers while they work out what they're going to buy. These product areas will often be clearly marked out in a separate area. >

HOW TO AVOID OVERSPENDING

Take a list People who shop with a list tend to spend less.

Use unit pricing to compare value for money, as buying in bulk is not necessarily always the cheapest option.

Shop alone People who shop as a couple tend to put more in their trolley, as each person will have their own idea about what's important and should be purchased.

Avoid big supermarkets Don't shop at a big supermarket if you just want to drop in and pick up a few things – you're much better off in a small store. It takes more effort to get in and out of a big supermarket, and as a result you may feel the need to stock up once you're in there.

Avoid the extras such as products offering 100g extra for a little more cost. It's an economy of scale – you don't save money, you'll just eat more.

Eat before you shop Don't shop when you're hungry – it's a sure-fire way to end up with a trolley full of unnecessary purchases.

NUMBER CRUNCH

7

The maximum number of supermarket items a typical person can remember – so make sure you take a shopping list if you plan to buy more.

25%

The percentage of the whole supermarket covered in an average shopping trip.

DID YOU KNOW?

Shoppers look at the middle of the shelves at eye level, and then 40 degrees up and 10 degrees down. The products that make the largest profit margin can be found within this range.

As supermarkets gain more information about their customers' individual shopping habits, stores are likely to be refined to suit their unique needs

Chop and change

< While some basic layout rules of supermarkets never seem to change, such as the fruit and vegetables section being close to the entry, in other sections supermarkets are constantly changing things around, moving products and revamping displays.

Harrison says supermarkets are always trying out new selling methodologies, but can walk a fine line between keeping consumers on their toes and just confusing them. "Most of our shopping is habitual, and one way to get us out of our habits is to unsettle us a little bit. Moving product around is about mixing it up and trying to change shoppers' habits."

The future

As retailers gain more detailed information about their customers' individual shopping habits through loyalty programs (see Cart Sharks, *CHOICE* February 2010), many consumer experts believe that in the future, more stores will be refined to suit their particular audience.

Harrison predicts the future of supermarket shopping lies in segmenting the market, with different stores for different types of customers. "I imagine there will be more sub-brands in the future. For example, Woolworths' Thomas Dux stores, which are very bespoke, tend to appear in aspirational suburbs where people might be a bit wealthier than average and don't like being overwhelmed. Coles Express stores work well in city areas and places where shoppers tend to get in and out quickly. As the market segments I think we'll see a greater variety of offerings and supermarket brands for different customers." ■

DID YOU KNOW?

Colour your world

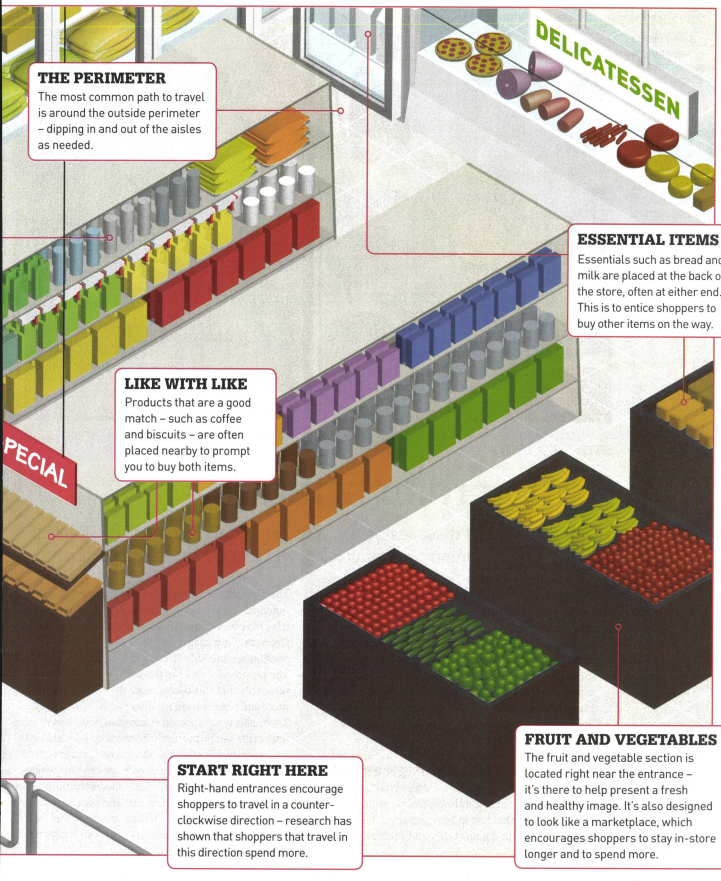
Beyond the basic geography of the typical supermarket, there are plenty of marketing tactics that work on the subconscious. Colour in particular is a powerful messenger. The most common colours used in supermarket products and packaging are:

- **Red** The strongest colour in the spectrum gets attention; it's also used in signage indicating an item is discounted or on special.
- **Green** evokes a sense of freshness and health.
- **Blue** releases trust hormones.
- **Yellow / gold** Common in food packaging, golden shades mimic the colour of fat and can evoke feelings of hunger.

AISLE ENDS
The ends of the row are often the most profitable area for product manufacturers and they often pay a premium to have their product placed there. These displays also act as a welcome mat to lure shoppers further down the aisle.

LOOK HIGH AND LOW
The products that make the largest profit margin will usually be found at eye level – you won't find a bargain in the best shelf spots so it pays to look further up and down.

AT THE CHECKOUT
Last-minute temptations such as chocolates, lollies, magazines and cold drinks are all located here to entice bored, tired shoppers (and their children) while they wait to be served.



THE PERIMETER

The most common path to travel is around the outside perimeter – dipping in and out of the aisles as needed.

ESSENTIAL ITEMS

Essentials such as bread and milk are placed at the back of the store, often at either end. This is to entice shoppers to buy other items on the way.

LIKE WITH LIKE

Products that are a good match – such as coffee and biscuits – are often placed nearby to prompt you to buy both items.

FRUIT AND VEGETABLES

The fruit and vegetable section is located right near the entrance – it's there to help present a fresh and healthy image. It's also designed to look like a marketplace, which encourages shoppers to stay in-store longer and to spend more.

START RIGHT HERE

Right-hand entrances encourage shoppers to travel in a counter-clockwise direction – research has shown that shoppers that travel in this direction spend more.

NUTSHELL

>> Bowel cancer screening is recommended for all people aged over 50.
>> Breast cancer screening is recommended for all women aged 50-69.
>> Universal prostate cancer screening is not recommended.

STORY MARTIN BRAY & DR. KERRY KIRKE

Full screen ahead

Many tests detect diseases before your symptoms occur. CHOICE looks at the major screening programs for bowel, breast and prostate cancer.

Over the course of a lifetime, you may be screened for a variety of diseases. To help decide which tests are worth taking, it's helpful to understand the criteria the public health system uses to assess possible screening tests.

- The condition to be screened for should be an important health problem, and it must be known that it can be present in an early form without any symptoms.
- The test should be simple, safe, sensitive (few false negative results) and specific (few false positive results). The possible results of the test that are used to indicate the need for further testing or treatment should be clearly defined and widely agreed.
- Early treatment of the condition tested for must be proved to be effective in bringing about better outcomes by reducing mortality and improving quality of life.
- These better outcomes must clearly outweigh any potential harm to people from the screening, such as false positives leading to unnecessary psychological stress, invasive diagnostic tests and treatment with possible serious side effects.
- The proposed screening program would not use resources that could save more lives and prevent more suffering if used in other ways.
- The health system should ensure that positive screening test results can be promptly followed up – for example, colonoscopy following a positive bowel cancer test.

The benefits of screening people are obvious when you look at the table, right, which shows the number of cases in Australia of bowel, breast and prostate cancer recorded in 2006. In your lifetime, you may well be screened for any one of these diseases – so it pays to understand the whys and wherefores.

NUMBER CRUNCH

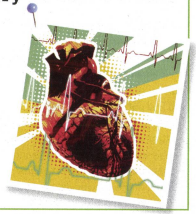
17,444

The number of prostate cancer cases in Australia in 2006.

DID YOU KNOW?

Cardiovascular screening – a success story

In 1968, heart attacks, strokes and other vascular diseases accounted for 56% of all deaths in Australia; by 2005, this had fallen to 35%. Many GPs carry out informal or "opportunistic" screening for heart and circulatory disease risk. Regular blood pressure checks, blood tests to measure cholesterol and lipids (fats) and reviews of body mass index, together with reduced smoking rates, much improved treatment options for early stage disease and evidence-based advice, have resulted in marked decreases in potential years of life lost due to heart attacks, strokes and other diseases of the circulatory system. This trend is encouraging, but there's still room for further improvement in relation to prevention, early detection and treatment of these diseases.



Screening for any health condition should be simple, safe, sensitive and specific

Bowel cancer screening

The National Bowel Cancer Screening program could save 2000 deaths annually when fully operational. The program, which began in 2006, uses faecal occult blood tests (FOBT), but unfortunately one of the test kits was unreliable (see *CHOICE* March Consumer News, page 8). The program started again at the end of last year when about 600,000 test kits were rolled out. Men and women turning 50 between January 2008 and December 2010, and those turning 55 or 65 between July 2008 and December 2010, are now being offered a free FOBT kit for home use.

If you don't want to wait for the program to catch up with you – especially if there's a family history of the disease – you can use one of two home test kits from pharmacies: "Detectacol" costs $29.95 and "Insure" $14.95. The Insure kit requires another $14.95 to be sent to the laboratory with the test card unless it is accompanied by a doctor's letter. You should consider FOBT if:

- You are aged 50 or older, without symptoms and without a family history of bowel cancer. It is advised you take an FOBT every two years.

THE MOST COMMON CANCERS IN AUSTRALIA (2006)

Cancer site (listed in order of cases)	Cases	Deaths
Prostate (male)	17,444	2952
Bowel (sexes combined)	13,591	3801
Breast (sexes combined)	12,716	2643
Skin (melanoma; sexes combined)*	10,326	1238
Lung (sexes combined)#	9563	7348

TABLE NOTES: * Non-melanoma skin cancer (NMSC) is excluded, as the two most common types of NMSC are not notifiable cancers. # Figures for lung, bronchioles and trachea. Source: *Australian Cancer Incidence and Mortality books*, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2010.

- As with all screening tests, there will be false negative and false positive results. The FOBT is no exception, but it does meet international criteria for a screening test.
- Remember that the benefits of screening, such as early detection, only apply if you are tested.

If your FOBT is positive, this does not necessarily mean cancer because several other conditions can result in bleeding in the bowel. However, it does mean you need further investigation, usually in the form of a colonoscopy, where the doctor can see the inside of the large bowel. Polyps that can go on to become cancerous, or early cancers, can be removed. But not all polyps or cancers bleed, so a negative FOBT does not guarantee no cancer. Another test that may be used, either alone or in conjunction with FOBT, is sigmoidoscopy, which examines the lower part of the large bowel.

Deaths from bowel cancer in Australia were steady up to the mid-1980s. From then they have fallen by about 40%, probably due to a steady uptake of informal FOBT screening, reduced smoking, maybe better diets and more physical activity.

Breast cancer screening

The successful BreastScreen Australia program operates in more than 500 locations, using X-Ray mammography. It's aimed at women without symptoms aged 50 to 69, but women aged 40 and older can get free screening. It is one of the most comprehensive population-based screening programs in the world – well over 1.5 million women were screened in 2005/2006.

Generally, mammography is less effective in younger women because of dense breast tissue being more opaque to X-rays. Older women (aged 70+) who have been involved in the program can elect to continue >

Genetic testing can be useful if there is a family history of a disease, but it also raises difficult ethical issues around insurance

DID YOU KNOW?

Genetic testing explained

"Bad" genes in our genetic makeup (that is, in our inherited DNA) may increase our chances of getting a certain disease. There are two ways to find out if you are at risk: by looking at your family history for patterns of genetically determined (inherited) diseases, or by having a genetic test for suspect genes linked to the specific disease. However, we couldn't afford to test everyone to see if they might get one of the top 30 diseases, and many diseases with a genetic component are the result of several genes interacting, so finding the "main" gene doesn't always tell you a lot anyway. If genetic testing is suggested, it's usually being done to confirm or refute a strong suspicion of inherited disease from your family history and/or ethnic background.

If your family history shows an increased risk of breast cancer, genetic testing might be offered. Women who carry BRCA1 and BRCA2 gene mutations are at high risk of developing breast and ovarian cancer and a personalised "screening" program may include mammography and /or ultrasound, and even checking for ovarian cancer. Screening may begin at a much earlier age than for "average risk" women – usually five years before the age at diagnosis of the nearest relative.

ISSUES RAISED BY GENETIC TESTING

Genetic testing can raise tricky issues, so counselling is advisable before going ahead.

- If the test is positive, and there is no treatment, such as with Huntington's disease, will you feel worse?
- Companies providing life or disability insurance may ask you for any genetic test results. If you do not know, you can answer questions honestly without losing policy benefits.
- If a young person tests positive for significant mutations, this has significance for close relatives, especially parents.

GENETIC TESTING COSTS

For women with a high risk of breast cancer, genetic testing may be covered by the state health department. If the criteria for a free test are not met, the cost for a comprehensive check of BRCA1 and 2 can cost about $2000. This cost reduces for other family members who want to be tested to about $275.

SOME EXCEPTIONS TO POPULATION GENETIC TESTING

For now, good arguments for whole-of-population genetic testing only apply in relation to pregnancy and newborns. Parents could be tested when planning a pregnancy for the cystic fibrosis gene, and if both have it, testing of the foetus can be done. Down syndrome testing is an example of testing during pregnancy for a genetically based abnormality. The newborn or Guthrie tests don't actually involve DNA analysis; rather, they look for protein markers in the blood that may indicate genetically inherited conditions.

MORE INFORMATION

Go to www.genetests.org (produced by the University of Washington, Seattle).

< free two-yearly screening. Despite actively recruiting women in the 50-69 year age group, only 57% of them are screened. This is disappointing, given the program's objective is to screen 70% of this group. About 25% of screens are in women outside this age range. Breast compression during mammography may discourage some women, but again, early detection and a better chance of successful treatment can only happen if you are screened.

Effectiveness of screening Regular two-yearly mammograms have been shown to pick up many small tumours in the early stages of development before they start to spread to other parts of the body. Most of these can be successfully treated. A recent report says that between 1991-2006, BreastScreen Australia reduced breast cancer mortality in women aged between 50-60 by up to 29%. A rigorous accreditation process applies to all sites to ensure maintenance of the highest possible standards.

Research is ongoing to find ways to improve the false negatives and false positives of screening tests. Technologies other than X-Ray mammography, such as ultrasound and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), are showing some promise, but so far only in conjunction with mammography.

Genetic screening can also be useful where there is a family history of breast cancer, but it can be expensive (see Genetic Testing Explained, left) and raises quite difficult ethical issues, such as life insurance companies reducing their risk exposure and other family members not wanting to know their high-risk status.

A useful reference is 'Advice about familial aspects of breast cancer and epithelial ovarian cancer', which can be found at www.nbocc.org.au (search for 'familial aspects').

Prostate cancer screening

Prostate cancer can be present in an early and potentially treatable form without any symptoms, but if it's detected from symptoms later on, the chance of a cure is low. In *Australia's Health 2008*, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare said:

- The lifetime risk of prostate cancer for men is one in five (20%).
- Prostate cancer is responsible for 29% of cancers in men (excluding non-melanoma skin cancers).
- Prostate cancer is the second-most common cause of cancer deaths in males.

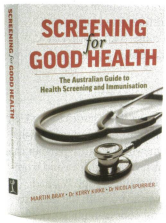
Possible prostate tests Prostate cancer screening is controversial because many older men who screen 'positive' will undergo treatment with side effects such as incontinence and impotence. Elderly men are more likely to die of something else before prostate cancer claims their life. If you're middle-aged rather than elderly, testing makes sense because the chance of dying from this often slow-growing cancer is much greater when it occurs at a younger age.

CONTACTS
Cancer Council Australia www.cancer.org.au
Cancer Helpline 13 11 20 (cost of a local call)
Cancer Screening www.cancerscreening.gov.au

Prostate cancer often raises the levels of prostate specific antigen (PSA) in the blood, which is measured with a blood test. The acceptable level varies with age – 2.5 the maximum for the 40-49 age group, and 5.5 the maximum for the 70-79 age group. Also, about 75% of positives are false alarms, and one study showed half of all men with an abnormal PSA returned to normal when tested six weeks later. About 15% of men with prostate cancer will not have a high PSA. The false negatives and false positives contribute to the controversy around PSA testing.

As well as a PSA test, your GP is also encouraged to perform a digital rectal examination (DRE) – checking the prostate by feel which will pick up about half of all tumours over 10mm. Medicare will cover one PSA test per year, and any subsequent tests to monitor suspected cancer. Guidelines for general practitioners suggest individuals need to make their own decision about prostate screening after being fully apprised of potential risks and benefits. The Urological Society is slightly more proactive, recommending that men aged between 50 and 70 with at least 10 years' life expectancy should have PSA and DRE yearly after counselling.

For more information to help you decide if a prostate cancer screening test is right for you, go to www.andrologyaustralia.org/docs/PSAdecisioncard20041007.pdf ■


SCREENING for GOOD HEALTH
The Australian Guide to Health Screening and Immunisation
MARTIN BRADY • Dr KERRY KIRKE • Dr NICOLA SPURRIER

Screening for Good Health **is a practical guide to screening and immunisation, providing an overview of life stages, relevant tests for each age bracket and how to maintain your own record-keeping.**

Prostate cancer testing makes sense for middle-aged men, because the chance of dying from this cancer is much greater when it occurs at a younger age

Who should you fly with to Aussie travellers' most popular destinations?

NUTSHELL

>> Compare prices, flight schedules and types of aircraft for at least three airlines before deciding which one to fly with.

>> The seat pitch and width of aircrafts on each airline varies; knowing this for your flight will give you an indication of seat comfort and leg room.

STORY TANYA FONG

Happy landings

9000 CHOICE members reveal the best airlines to take you on your next overseas trip.

CHOICE's latest survey of 9000 members has confirmed the best – and worst – airlines to fly with to the top 12 favourite travel destinations for Aussie travellers. As with our last international airline survey (see *CHOICE*, May 2009), Singapore Airlines is once again the best airline to fly with for 11 of the 12 destinations, and once again many Qantas Frequent Flyer members do not think the Flying Kangaroo is delivering on cost or in-flight service.

We also tell you which airlines rated highest for cost satisfaction for which route, such as AirAsia X to Malaysia and V Australia to the US.

Europe (UK and Italy)

UK

While most CHOICE members flew Qantas to the UK, overall it did not rate well for this destination. British Airways (BA), a Qantas' Oneworld alliance partner that codeshares with Qantas on several flights to and from London (see Codesharing explained, page 72), had the lowest overall satisfaction score, with the majority of member complaints citing poor in-flight service.

"We had a five-month-old baby with us, and the BA head stewardess was rude and confrontational," CHOICE member Sam told us. BA also scored poorly for food quality, leg room and seat comfort.

Etihad Airways (the United Arab Emirates' national airline based in Abu Dhabi), Japan Airlines and Royal Brunei Airlines had higher cost satisfaction scores than Singapore Airlines, and may be worth considering for your next UK trip. Our WA and Queensland members who have the option to fly to the UK with Royal Brunei said while this carrier's in-flight entertainment wasn't fantastic, its in-flight service overall was good. It also offers one-way business class seats that cost on average almost half that of Singapore.

UNITED KINGDOM

Airline (n)	Overall score (%)	Cost score (%)	In-flight service score (%)
Singapore Airlines (513)	81	74	86
Japan Airlines (35)	79	80	85
Emirates (419)	70	70	74
Thai Airways (72)	68	69	79
Etihad Airways (79)	68	76	70
Virgin Atlantic (62)	67	72	72
Malaysia Airlines (103)	67	69	73
Cathay Pacific (134)	66	66	71
Qantas (1038)	63	61	67
Royal Brunei (31)	62	82	74
British Airways (230)	57	61	60

ITALY

Airline (n)	Overall score (%)	Cost score (%)	In-flight service score (%)
Singapore Airlines (95)	82	75	84
Malaysia Airlines (31)	72	75	74
Cathay Pacific (55)	71	70	73
Emirates (145)	70	69	74
Qantas (100)	62	59	65

NEW ZEALAND

Airline (n)	Overall score (%)	Cost score (%)	In-flight service score (%)
Emirates (260)	82	84	84
Air New Zealand (777)	73	69	75
Pacific Blue (293)	67	75	63
Qantas (712)	65	63	66
Jetstar (230)	58	77	53

Once again, Singapore Airlines is our members' carrier of choice, topping the list for almost all of your favourite destinations

Italy

In general, members do not think Qantas is good value for money for Italy. The total travel time is also an issue, as Qantas requires transferring to a codeshare plane at Heathrow or Hong Kong, whereas Singapore Airlines flies direct to Italy after transiting in Singapore. (Flights to Italy generally transit first in Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Dubai or London.)

Although only 31 members flew Malaysia Airlines to Italy, 75% were as satisfied with the ticket cost as those who flew with Singapore. "The food was pretty bland but Malaysia was an efficient and economical carrier to fly with to Italy," said CHOICE member John. Members also rated its in-flight service well.

If you're prepared to pay a little more for your next Italian trip, Emirates has good in-flight service, entertainment and food quality.

HOW WE SURVEY

9000 CHOICE members responded to our survey invites in December 2009, asking them to rate how satisfied they were for their most recent international flights to any of the top 12 destinations that Australians travel to (according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics). Members were able to rate up to three airlines on cost, in-flight services and entertainment, seat comfort, leg room, food quality, redeeming frequent flyer points, timeliness of flights, baggage allowance and check-in process. We've included the overall, cost and in-flight service satisfaction scores in this report.

A total of 15 destinations, including Fiji, India and the Philippines, were rated. However, these destinations are excluded in this report because the destinations had less than three airlines serving the route and/or a sample size of less than 30.

Note: in our tables, "n" is the lowest number of respondents who contributed to the scores listed in the table.

Pacific Ocean

New Zealand

Trans-Tasman competition was fierce in 2009, with a price war between Emirates, Qantas/Jetstar (codesharing), Pacific Blue (one of Virgin Blue's sister overseas carriers) and Air New Zealand. Although more CHOICE members flew with NZ's flag carrier, their preferred carrier overall was Emirates. Said CHOICE member Tania: "We have flown with Qantas and Air New Zealand, which are both great, but Emirates is the best."

A CHOICE member said he had a "terrible experience" flying Jetstar to NZ. "The trip ended up costing more than a comparable Air NZ ticket because of the extra cost of drinks and meals on an international flight." Members were generally also unhappy using Qantas Frequent Flyer points to redeem Jetstar flights as they still had to pay for meals, which they don't need to on Qantas.

USA

V Australia, Virgin Blue's full service trans-Pacific carrier, had the highest cost satisfaction score among members and was only second to Singapore for overall satisfaction – but unlike Singapore (or Air NZ, Hawaiian Airlines or Air Canada), offers direct flights between Australian and US cities.

The majority of CHOICE members flew Qantas to the USA, and several noted differences between taking the Airbus A380 and Boeing's 747-400. "I travelled to New York from Melbourne on the 747-400 and returned on the A380," said CHOICE member John, "and found the A380 quieter and more comfortable."

However, despite using Boeing's 777-300 instead of the A380, V Australia also impresses our members, and is "amazingly good value for money" according to CHOICE member Samantha. "I flew V Australia from Sydney to Los Angeles. Its aircraft was modern and roomy, and the staff were lovely."

CHOICE member Eddie believes United Airlines "should not be allowed to survive. It's really a budget >

GOOD NEWS: GET THE BEST FLIGHT DEAL

When you're booking a flight you may be influenced by the loyalty program you subscribe to, but it's always worth comparing prices and in-flight service, as well as less obvious factors such as the flight schedules, type of aircraft you'll be flying, where the aircraft transits, and for how long. If you're flying to London, for example, always try to book an A380 flight (with Singapore Airlines, Qantas or Emirates), which has a bigger seat width and a deeper seat pitch.

Here are our members' top time- and money-saving tips.

- **Book early** Sign up to airline e-newsletters that alert you of cheaper airfares, such as Jetstar's Friday Frenzy, Qantas' Red Deals and Singapore Airlines' 2-to-go deals.
- **Search on travel websites** such as www.webjet.com.au, www.expedia.com.au, www.hotwire.com.au, and www.jetabroad.com.au and www.tripadvisor.com. Remember to clear your cookies and keep refreshing your page, as the prices on some travel websites increase as soon as you navigate away from their page and re-visit later.
- **Check the airlines' own websites** as well as comparator sites before booking – there may be cheaper deals found only there. Virgin Blue, for example, posts its bargain fares between 12pm-1pm daily. Also, check for where the airline transits, as well as its codeshare partners (see Codesharing Explained, page 72) or subsidiaries to avoid flying with lower-quality carriers.
- **Look for travel websites that offer lowest-price guarantees** If you find a flight with an Australian travel agent or airline that's cheaper than a flight you found at Flight Centre, they will beat the price by $1 and give you a $20 voucher, or even fly you for free.
- **Go to www.flightstats.com** to find out if there will be airport delays, how to navigate around an airport where you'll be in transit, as well as the weather conditions when you land at your destination.
- **Find the best seats at www.seatguru.com** This tells you exactly how much seat space you have on a Boeing 777-300ER compared with a Boeing 747-400. You can see a layout of where the galley is (to get your food faster) and where the bathrooms are (stay far away).
- **Always check-in online or over the phone** to get the seats you want, especially if you're traveling in groups. If you don't, you're likely to be slotted separately and/or get the worst seats.
- **Check the time of arrival at your destination** to make the most of your holiday time. Remember to include the time spent at transit – less is more.
- **Always under-pack** Excess baggage costs for a Qantas flight from Australia to Europe, for example, costs $175 for 5kg.
- **Pack your own food** if you're flying with a budget airline. Even if you're OK with the menu (which you can find on the airline's website), sometimes the food gets sold out, especially if you're seated at the back of the plane.

USA

Airline (n)	Overall score (%)	Cost score (%)	In-flight service score (%)
Singapore Airlines (32)	81	72	86
V Australia (111)	80	88	82
Air New Zealand (134)	76	73	79
Hawaiian Airlines (71)	66	73	64
Qantas (1236)	65	64	69
Air Canada (33)	58	68	60
Jetstar (112)*	57	74	55
United Airlines (253)	50	66	49

TABLE NOTES * Jetstar's only US destination is Honolulu, Hawaii.

< carrier under a full service cloak. Save the heartache and pay for a full service airline."

South-east Asia

Indonesia (Bali)

Our members found better cost satisfaction flying to Indonesia with AirAsia and AirAsiaX rather than Jetstar. AirAsia only flies directly to Bali from Perth; Gold Coast and Melbourne passengers fly AirAsia X directly to Malaysia and must purchase separate tickets for the Indonesian leg.

Several members used their Qantas Frequent Flyer points to go to Bali on Jetstar and were appalled by the quality of the food, which you purchase onboard. They warned it's very much a "get what you pay for" budget airline.

If you're planning a budget Bali trip, Pacific Blue is our members' choice. "Pacific Blue was great and flies direct from Adelaide to Denpasar," said one.

INDONESIA (BALI)

Airline (n)	Overall score (%)	Cost score (%)	In-flight service score (%)
Singapore Airlines (n=41)	82	69	85
AirAsia X (n=35) (A)	69	86	65
Pacific Blue (n=91)	63	71	61
Garuda Indonesia (n=202)	63	68	65
Qantas (n=83)	63	60	62
Jetstar (n=240)	52	66	48

TABLE NOTES **(A)** Includes AirAsia.

MALAYSIA

Airline (n)	Overall score (%)	Cost score (%)	In-flight service score (%)
Singapore Airlines (46)	77	68	79
Malaysia Airlines (272)	68	70	72
Qantas (41)	68	62	69
AirAsia X (113)	63	89	58

Malaysia

Most members flew Malaysia Airlines (MAS) to Kuala Lumpur, but AirAsia X – also Malaysian-owned and part of the largest low-cost airline in Asia – was very popular for competitive prices. Both fly to Kuala Lumpur from the Gold Coast, Melbourne and Perth, but only MAS also offers direct flights from Adelaide, Brisbane and Sydney.

MAS and Qantas tied for overall satisfaction and had comparable scores for in-flight service and entertainment, seat comfort, leg room and food quality – but "MAS has much more room and better service than Qantas," according to CHOICE member Colin, who's also a Qantas Platinum Frequent Flyer.

Singapore

Emirates delivers good value for this popular destination and mid-point between long-haul flights. Its in-flight service may not be on par with Singapore Airlines, but it certainly matches their in-flight entertainment, seat comfort, leg room, food quality, flight timeliness, baggage allowance and check-in process. One CHOICE member experienced "exceptional customer service from Singapore to Australia on Emirates. The cabin crew took care of my child who had motion sickness."

Tiger Airways and Jetstar both offer cheaper no-frills flights, but expect to pay for snacks and drinks and sandwiches that are hardly gourmet. Seven hours without decent food can be unpleasant, and CHOICE member Ann's advice to anyone flying internationally with a budget airline is "take your own food". You'll also have to pay extra for an in-flight video player and bulkhead seats if you're tall or large.

SINGAPORE

Airline (n)	Overall score (%)	Cost score (%)	In-flight service score (%)
Singapore Airlines (475)	81	73	84
Emirates (44)	76	85	77
Qantas (297)	62	63	63
Tiger Airways (55)	61	83	54
Jetstar (73)	55	75	53

Thailand

Most members chose to fly Thai Airways instead of Singapore or Qantas to Thailand. AirAsia X is best if you're looking to travel on a budget, but be aware that you must transfer to AirAsia in Kuala Lumpur for a connecting flight.

General Jetstar gripes include delayed departures, late arrivals and poor communication, as well as poor food quality and paying for bottled water. "Our tickets were cheap but the whole experience has taught us never to fly long-haul again with a budget airline," said CHOICE member Leonie. "We would rather pay the extra for a comfortable, normal service."

Vietnam

Although most members flew Vietnam Airlines, our price check found cheaper flights to Vietnam on Singapore Airlines (SIA), provided you book early. As well as flying to Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh, SIA also flies into Da Nang, >

THAILAND

Airline (n)	Overall score (%)	Cost score (%)	In-flight service score (%)
Singapore Airlines (99)	80	72	85
Thai Airways (451)	73	72	77
AirAsia X (36)	62	85	58
Qantas (103)	61	57	62
Jetstar (140)	58	72	54
British Airways (37)	50	64	55

VIETNAM

Airline (n)	Overall score (%)	Cost score (%)	In-flight service score (%)
Singapore Airlines (106)	81	76	83
Malaysia Airlines (30)	69	na	76
Vietnam Airlines (119)	60	71	63
Jetstar (83)	53	75	48

TABLE NOTES **na** Not applicable – sample size less than 30.

CHOICE ONLINE

For the full results of our international airlines satisfaction survey, go to **www.choice.com.au/internationalair**. Look out for our domestic airlines satisfaction survey in the May issue of *CHOICE*, and find out which are the best online travel agencies and websites in June.

If you book a flight to Japan through Qantas, you're likely to be put on a Jetstar aircraft

< the city nearest to Hoi An, an ancient coastal town that's popular for its heritage sites and resorts.

Jetstar and Vietnam Airlines fly non-stop to Vietnam from Sydney, whereas SIA requires a transit in Singapore (or Kuala Lumpur with Malaysia).

Northern Asia

China

Members reported they were happy with Air China ticket prices, but not much else. "We were squashed in like sardines, many video and electronic systems did not work, and the food was basic and tasted processed," said CHOICE member William.

Cathay Pacific, Qantas and SIA flights to China require transfers in Singapore or Hong Kong. Despite this, SIA is once again the best choice. "Although its seats are not half as good as Cathay Pacific's, Singapore Airlines' in-flight crew is fantastic," said CHOICE member Abbe.

CHINA

Airline (n)	Overall score (%)	Cost score (%)	In-flight service score (%)
Singapore Airlines (82)	80	72	84
Cathay Pacific (55)	74	72	77
Qantas (184)	65	64	68
Air China (30)	61	84	na

TABLE NOTES **na** Not applicable – sample size less than 30.

HONG KONG

Airline (n)	Overall score (%)	Cost score (%)	In-flight service score (%)
Singapore Airlines (37)	84	78	87
Cathay Pacific (230)	71	70	75
Qantas (299)	65	63	65

Hong Kong

Most members flew Qantas to Hong Kong but did not rave about its in-flight service, food quality, seat comfort or leg room. Cathay Pacific was the second-most commonly used carrier, and had a good response for in-flight service and entertainment, food and seat comfort. Again, SIA is the clear winner overall, but unlike Cathay or Qantas does not offer direct flights to Hong Kong (transfer in Singapore is required).

Japan

Jetstar flies direct to both Osaka and Tokyo from the Gold Coast and Cairns. If you book your flight through Qantas, you may be put on an aircraft operated by Jetstar. Members were happy with Jetstar's ticket prices for this destination, but everything else, including food quality and in-flight service, got the thumbs down. Qantas did a marginally better job than its budget subsidiary for food quality, in-flight service and entertainment.

If you fly to Tokyo with Singapore Airlines, you can choose to board an A380 at your transit in Singapore. Japan Airlines (which only departs Sydney and Brisbane) also rated well, but is currently undergoing receivership. ■

JAPAN

Airline (n)	Overall score (%)	Cost score (%)	In-flight service score (%)
Singapore Airlines (31)	80	78	88
Japan Airlines (88)	71	68	78
Qantas (133)	63	62	65
Jetstar (116)	58	83	56

DID YOU KNOW?

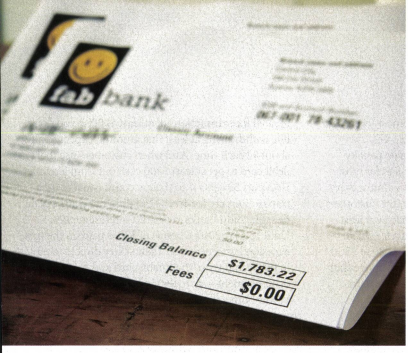
Codesharing explained

Under a codesharing agreement, the airline that operates the flight provides the plane, crew and ground handling services – but is different from the airline that sells the tickets. For example, a Qantas flight from London includes a codeshare with British Airways, which means you may fly at least one leg of your flight with BA even though you booked your ticket through Qantas.

Codesharing allows airlines greater access to cities without having to provide extra flights. Qantas, for example, does not fly to Italy directly, but codeshares with Cathay Pacific to Rome via Hong Kong or via London with BA.

Sister airlines, such as Virgin Blue/Pacific Blue and Qantas/Jetstar, also codeshare. Codes are usually shared between members of the two major airline alliances: Star Alliance, which includes Singapore Airlines, Lufthansa, United and Thai Airways, and Oneworld Alliance, which includes Qantas, Cathay Pacific, Japan Airlines and British Airways.

When booking your flight online, always check the fine print and whether your preferred airline includes a codeshare – otherwise you may end up booking your flight with a carrier whose services or seats you don't like.



STORY ALAN DOOLEY & CECILIA LEE

Freedom from fees

Switching to a new transaction account with no fees and low transaction costs may save you more than $200 per year. CHOICE selects the picks of the crop.

NUTSHELL

>> ING Direct and NAB offer bank accounts with no everyday transaction fees or penalties.

>> Total savings from switching to these accounts could amount to hundreds of millions of dollars per year.

Australian households paid $1.9 billion for transaction accounts in 2008, and banks' fee income has been growing at 8% annually. In many cases, we've been the victims of unfair and excessive charging. Penalties are a big part of the problem; bank dishonour, default and overdrawn transaction account fees amounted to $490 million in 2008.

CHOICE led the charge against those penalties, and under pressure from consumers, the Big Four banks responded with fee reductions. NAB went furthest, recently removing account penalties altogether – one of the reasons its Classic Banking account is an inaugural CHOICE Award winner (see page 16 for more).

Banks continue to charge high fees and penalties, but in recent months some excellent low-cost alternatives have been introduced. For the first time, Australian consumers can choose an account with no monthly fee, no fees for certain 'everyday' transactions and no penalty fees. Government data showing the impact of reduced charges on banks' fee income is not yet available, but by changing banking behaviour or switching to one of a new breed of low-fee accounts, the collective annual savings to bank customers could amount to hundreds of millions of dollars.

New options

We compared standalone transaction accounts available from all banks and the 10 largest building societies and credit unions. These accounts aren't bundled with other products; home loan customers, for example, may wish to consider the pros and cons of a mortgage offset account.

The transaction accounts in the table (page 74) offer a way to pay no monthly fees; in fact, of the major banks, only ANZ and Commonwealth have yet to introduce an account with an avoidable monthly fee for standard customers (though like most banks, ANZ and CBA offer low-cost basic accounts for pensioners and other low-income groups). ANZ's Access Select account charges $2 per month in return for six "free" electronic transactions; Access Advantage has a $5 monthly fee, with unlimited withdrawals from the bank's own ATMs, phone and internet banking, branch, cheque and EFTPOS access. CBA's standard transaction accounts have $4 and $6 monthly fees. With other institutions, some accounts have specific conditions to waive the monthly fee. The most common requirement is to make a regular monthly deposit of at least $2000.

As well as waiving or not charging monthly fees, some institutions go further, charging nothing for certain "everyday" transactions. Holders of such accounts can make an unlimited number of the following transaction types, for example, without paying any fee:

- ATM transactions at the bank's own network
- BPAY
- Branch cash deposits and withdrawals
- Cheque facility
- Direct credits and debits
- EFTPOS
- "Pay anyone" internet transactions

Of course, even with the best accounts, not all services are free and interest usually isn't paid – extra savings are often best directed elsewhere. A major expense is using "foreign" ATMs – those belonging to another bank or network. Approximately 40% of withdrawals are from such machines, and all those $2 transactions add up to about $640 million per year. The simplest way to avoid those fees is to stick your own bank's machines wherever possible. Also, all accounts charge fees to use your debit card for cash withdrawals and purchases when overseas. And while most providers continue to apply penalty fees, our Best Buys lead the pack on that measure.

Star performers

All the accounts in the table have either no monthly fee, or waive that fee for customers meeting certain criteria, >

NAB has displayed true industry leadership by abolishing overdrawn account fees on personal transaction and savings accounts

< and no fees for an unlimited number of most "everyday" transactions – but two stood out for penalty fees.

- **NAB Classic Banking** This account has no penalty fees, no monthly fee and no transaction fees for most everyday transactions. This account ticks almost every box, and unlike some others, doesn't require customers make a regular monthly deposit or withdraw at least $200 at a time to avoid fees. One catch is a fee when branch staff set up periodical payments ($1.80 to $5.30 per transaction), but NAB says branch and phone staff will help customers to set up such arrangements via internet banking, thereby avoiding the fees.
- **ING Direct Orange Everyday** ING has no ATM or branch network, but customers can use other banks' ATMs and Australia Post for deposits and withdrawals. Third-party ATM fees apply, but are rebated for transactions of at least $200; if you don't like withdrawing at least that amount, expect to pay about $2 each time. And when customers use their debit card to get at least $200 cash out from a retailer, ING puts 50 cents into their account (smaller cash out transactions are fee-free). ING does not charge penalty fees; like most banks, overdraft interest applies. Until 15 May 2010, a bonus of $20 is paid on the first occasion customers have their salary directly credited to the account, use their debit card and make a direct debit payment – up to $60 in bonus credits.

While both are great accounts, our top recommendation is NAB's. It meets all our criteria for an excellent low-fee transaction account, and doesn't require a minimum withdrawal to avoid ATM fees at the NAB/rediATM network. This Big Four bank

LOW-FEE BANK ACCOUNTS COMPARED

Institution / account (in alphabetical order within groups)	Some of the conditions to get zero monthly account fee	Interest rate	Everyday transaction fee-free and unlimite		
			Own ATM network	Bpay, EFTPOS, pay anyone	Branch deposits /
BEST BUYS					
ING Direct Orange Everyday	None	0.00%	(A)	√	√
NAB Classic Banking	None	0.01%	√	√	√
THE REST					
AMP eASYTransact	None	0.00%	√	√	√
Australian Central Credit Union Cheers Everyday – Full Access	$2500+ balance or ACCU home loan, or aged under 18 or over 55	0.00%	√	√	√
Bank of Queensland Reverse Charges Account	$2000 minimum balance	0.01%	√	√	√
Bank SA Complete Freedom	$2000+ deposit or BankSA home loan repayment automatically deducted	0.00%	√	√	√
Bankwest Hero	$2000+ monthly deposit	4% for up to $5000	√	√	√
Bankwest Zero	$2000+ monthly deposit	0.00%	√	√	√
Citibank Citibank Plus	None	0.00%	√	√	√
IMB Everyday Unlimited Account	$2000 minimum balance	0.00%	√	√	√
St George Complete Freedom	$2000+ deposit or St George home loan repayment automatically deducted	0.00%	√	√	√
Suncorp Everyday Basics	None	0.00%	√	√	√
Teachers Credit Union Everyday Account	For criteria go to Teachers Credit Union's website	0.01-0.10%	√	√	√
Westpac Choice	$2000+ monthly deposit	0.00%	√	√	√

TABLE NOTES * In addition to overdraft fees, interest generally applies to overdrawn accounts. ** Generally, a currency conversion fee applies to all overseas transa In addition, a separate transaction fee usually applies for ATM withdrawals, and sometimes for purchases. **(A)** ING Direct does not have an ATM network. Customers ca withdraw from other institutions' machines, with their fee rebated for withdrawals of at least $200. **(B)** $15 for the first overdrawn account letter, $25 for the second, $ for the default notice, $35 for a demand letter. **(C)** $30 per overdrawn item, maximum three items per day. **(D)** $100 safety net applies before penalty fee is charged.

also displayed genuine industry leadership when it abolished overdrawn account fees on personal transaction and savings accounts, previously its most common source of customer complaints.

Make sure you choose the account that best suits your needs. For example, if you want to be able to withdraw fee-free from any ATM in Australia and are prepared to take out at least $200 each time, ING Direct could work out best. But if you like to withdraw smaller amounts and can stick to the NAB/rediATM network, NAB could work out cheaper.

Other good offers

Two Bankwest accounts are worth a mention.

- **Bankwest Hero** customers need to deposit at least $2000 per month to be eligible for this account, which has no monthly fee and no fees for most transactions. It pays 4% interest for balances up to $5000, but no interest after that. Bankwest has a penalty fee "safety limit" – no penalty fees are charged for overdrawn accounts and dishonours unless the amount exceeds $100, in which case the fees are $15.
- **Bankwest Zero** This account has most of the same features as Hero, except instead of paying interest, it rebates ATM fees charged when customers withdraw from machines belonging to ANZ, Commonwealth Bank, NAB, St George and Westpac.

Earning interest

Most of the accounts in this low-fee comparison do not pay interest, so they're unsuitable for extra savings – you may need a separate or linked savings account for >

CHOICE ONLINE

Compare in detail other fee-free bank accounts available from banks, building societies and credit unions, at **www.choice.com.au/money**. This report and table profiles what we consider the very best of those accounts – those with zero (or avoidable) account fees and unlimited number of specified fee-free "everyday" transactions.

alty fees					Overseas debit card transaction fees**			
per transaction	Periodical payment insufficient funds	Cheque dishonour (outward)	Direct debit dishonour	Inward cheque dishonour	Currency conversion	ATM cash withdrawal	EFTPOS (purchase)	Contact
	$0	$0	$0	$0	2.5%	$2.50	$0	ingdirect.com.au
	$0	$0	$0	$0	2%	$4	$0	nab.com.au
	$18	$45	$40	$15	2.5%	$5.50	$1.50	amp.com.au
35 (B)	$5	$35	$35	$11.70 (J)	2%	$5	$0	accu.com.au
(C)	$40	$40	$40	$18.78	2.5%	$5	$0	boq.com.au
	$9	$9	$9	$0	2%	$5	$0	banksa.com.au
$15 (D)	$0-$15 (D)	$0-$15 (D)	$0-$15 (D)	$0	2.95%	$5	$0	bankwest.com.au
$15 (D)	$0-$15 (D)	$0-$15 (D)	$0-$15 (D)	$0	2.95%	$5	$0	bankwest.com.au
	$9	$9	$9	$0	2.5%	$0	$0	citibank.com.au
(E)	$30	$35	$30-$40 (H)	$10.50	2% or $5 (K)	2% or $5 (K)	2% or $5 (K)	imb.com.au
	$9	$9	$9	$0	2.5%	$5	$0	stgeorge.com.au
	$10	na (G)	$10	$0	2.5%	$5 (L)	$0	suncorp.com.au
	10 (F)	$35	15-35	$10	2%	$4	$0	teacherscreditunion.com.au
	$9	$9	$9	0	3.00%	$5	$0	westpac.com.au

harged when the account is overdrawn for more then 20 days. **(F)** $10 charged on the 3rd, 4th and 5th unsuccessful attempt to meet the payment. Payment cancelled on 5th ccessful attempt. **(G)** Not applicable – no cheque book facility with this account. **(H)** $40 for inward direct debit dishonour; $30 for outward direct debit dishonour. **(J)** Fee is charged when cheque presented at Australia Post or NAB. **(K)** Whichever is greater. **(L)** $5 per $1000 advanced, or part thereof.
collected by CHOICE, January 2010.

Australian consumers can now choose a bank account with no monthly or penalty fees and no fees for certain everyday transactions

< that purpose. However, some transaction accounts pay interest too, for example:

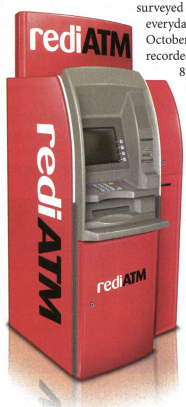
- AMP First: 4.65% pa
- Arab Bank Australia Online Savings Account: 5.3% pa
- Bankwest Hero: 4% pa on amounts up to $5000

The AMP and Arab Bank accounts do not feature in the table because of their fees. They're profiled in detail at **www.choice.com.au/money**.

The mutual alternative

Some of the building societies and credit unions we've analysed (known collectively as mutual societies) feature in the table, while others were omitted because they charge fees for transactions and then provide rebates based on the value of the member's relationship. Credit unions can offer low costs for those prepared to bundle several financial products with the same institution. For example, mecu rebates up to $25 per month depending on the value of your "membership support level" – the sum of your deposits, plus borrowings, less overdrawn accounts. Similarly, Credit Union of Australia (CUA) offers up to 15 free transactions per month depending on the dollar value of your relationship with the credit union. Newcastle Permanent Building Society claims that after rebates, few of its members pay fees.

The X factor of mutual societies is the high levels of customer satisfaction they generate. When we last surveyed our members on their levels of everyday banking satisfaction (*CHOICE*, October 2009), mutuals collectively recorded an average satisfaction score of 83% for everyday banking, with CUA and Teachers Credit Union the highest individual institutions (both 84%). The average score for banks was 66%.



You can find details about your local mutual society at www.abacus.org.au. Their branch network is generally far smaller than the banks', but many mutuals are members of the rediATM scheme, which recently merged with NAB to create one of the country's largest ATM networks. This means many mutual society members can use both rediATM (left) and NAB machines and avoid paying foreign (third party) ATM fees. ■

DID YOU KNOW?

How to switch bank accounts

Identify the best account Don't expect your financial institution to automatically switch you to its lowest fee account — NAB, for example, says customers will need to initiate that process.

Open the new account You generally need to provide 100 points of identification, but some banks make this easier for existing customers. Customers of ING Direct's Savings Maximiser can use an electronic verification process to open an Orange Everyday account without having to visit an Australia Post outlet.

Contact your existing bank for a list of all your automatic payments Under the government's bank account switching package, financial institutions must provide consumers with a list of their direct credit and debits for the previous 13 months, to make it easier to arrange for the new institution to set up those payments. You'll also need to check for regular direct debit and 'pay anyone' arrangements.

Set up regular payments from your new account If you give the new institution a list of all your regular credit and debit payments, this should help you to re-establish those payments on the new account with forms to advise each relevant organisation of your new account details. Alternatively, you can download standard change of debit and credit letters from the Australian Payments Clearing Association at www.apca.com.au.

Lodge money to the new account Make sure there's at least enough money to cover upcoming scheduled payments. Redirect your salary and other payments to the new account.

Leave the old account open with some money in it for a short time, to make sure no more payments are going in or out.

Close the old account When everything is running smoothly with the new account, transfer any remaining balance to the new account and close the old one.

NUTSHELL

>> Do-it-yourself will kits are a low-cost option for drafting a simple will. CHOICE put four to the test and found big differences.
>> There are many pitfalls around drafting your will; in most cases, it's safer to get expert advice.

STORY UTA MIHM

Where there's no will...

Drafting your will may not be a pleasant task, but it's essential for protecting your loved ones.

If you haven't got round to writing or updating your will, you're not alone: according to the NSW Public Trustee, about 40% of Australians don't have a valid will. Even if you've made one at some point, it's important to keep it up to date. If you marry, for example, your will is likely to be revoked; and if one of your beneficiaries dies, part of your will may no longer be valid.

If you die without a will, your estate will be distributed according to rules set out in state legislation. This may mean your spouse is not adequately protected, especially if they're de facto.

Do-it-yourself (D.I.Y.) kits promise a cheap and easy way to make your own will, but do they live up to their claims? CHOICE put four to the test, asking our experts to evaluate them (see Meet the Experts, page 80). Their verdict is that while the best will kit analysed may enable a competent user to write a simple will, it's always safest to have a lawyer check your will, especially if you have young children.

How to draft your will

While the rules differ in different states, there are some common aspects:

Usually you must be 18 years old or already married
The will must be in writing, and you must have testamentary capacity. This essentially means you must be of sound mind and understand the implications of making a will, what assets you have and who your usual beneficiaries would be. >

WHO CAN CONTEST MY WILL?

Even if you disinherit immediate family members or dependants, they may still be able to contest your will. CHOICE spoke with Gerard Malouf Partners, which has dealt with a case of three adult children of a farmer who left all his assets – total value $525,000, including the family home – to two charities. Subsequently, his children contested the will and eventually achieved a settlement of $300,000.

Your spouse, children, de facto partner, any dependants or former spouse can usually contest your will. They would normally need to convince the court that you have failed to make adequate provisions for their maintenance, education or advancement in life.

But there is no moral duty to bequest money to all your usual heirs. In a recent case, a father distributed his assets equally between his children except his eldest son, who was left out altogether. The eldest son contested the will, claiming it was his father's moral duty to provide for him. This claim was rejected by the High Court, which did not see "moral duty" as a defining element of the relevant legislation.

DID YOU KNOW?

Public trustee services

Public trustees were originally established to look after deceased estates where there was no will and no relatives. Today they still offer these services, plus they can also help you make your own will and store it securely.

Although public trustee will-making costs are competitive or free, they usually request to be the executor of your estate. Charges for this service differ depending on the state you live in, but range up to a commission of 5.5% of the value of your estate in the case of the Victorian Public Trustee. This may work out to be expensive if your estate is straightforward. However, in complicated cases, such as when trusts are being established for funds inherited by young children and there are a number of complicated taxation issues to resolve, the fees can be very competitive. In some states, public trustees charge an hourly rate rather than commission for administration costs. Public trustees also offer trust administration services and can look after your affairs if you become incapacitated and give them an enduring power of attorney.

Public trustees are state government agencies; you can find their contact details in the phone book or by searching on www.australia.gov.au.

D.I.Y. WILL KITS

WILL FORM*

Supplier: Quill
Price: $3.35
Bought at: NSW newsagents
Description: Will form with some examples and basic instructions.

Good points

- Very affordable.
- Suggests obtaining expert advice if in doubt.

Bad points

- Very basic instructions – could confuse rather than clarify.
- Issues relating to children, taxation, superannuation and executors are not adequately covered. There is no option to select an alternative executor.

Verdict

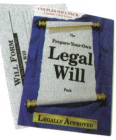
Most basic of the will kits reviewed.

Simple will: OK – could be an option for a well-informed user who requires an urgent will and only has adult beneficiaries without special needs.

Complex will: Not recommended.

* Quill told CHOICE they no longer supply this product, and that it was only supplied to newsagents in NSW, Queensland, Tasmania and Victoria.

THE PREPARE-YOUR-OWN LEGAL WILL PACK – COUPLES WILL PACK



Supplier: Nation Wise Products
Price: $32.50
Bought at: Australia Post
Description: Comprehensive bookle with two will forms.

Good points

- Contains a warning to obtain legal advice if your situation is complex or complicated.
- Covers issues relating to children and briefly addresses superannuation.

Bad points

- Does not explain what would constitute a complex or complicated situation.
- Taxation is not adequately covered.
- Some instructions are given about the choice of executors, but the structure of the will form might confuse users about their options.

Verdict

Provides a good amount of information, is very accessible and well structured for a well-informed user.

Simple will: Good. Additional expert advice recommended if you have young children or adult beneficiaries with special needs.

Complex will: Not recommended.

Any financial arrangements made in your lifetime do not die with you – they must be honoured by your estate

Be clear about anyone mentioned in your will Rather than simply writing "my spouse", state their full name. Ordinary wording and everyday terms do not necessarily have the same meaning in law, which can be quite specific and precise. Ambiguous wording is extremely common in homemade wills, which may result in substantial costs and delay, so it's always a good idea to get legal advice when preparing your will. This can cost anywhere between $200 and $1000, so shop around.

Your will must be signed in the presence of two independent witnesses In some states, the witnesses cannot be beneficiaries or the spouse of a beneficiary, otherwise they may lose their inheritance.

Appoint an executor The executor's duties include not only distributing your assets according to your wishes, but also applying to the Supreme Court for probate – a formal document that gives the executor permission to administer your estate, lodge a tax return and establish any trusts (such as bequests given to young children). This can be quite onerous and time-consuming, so check they're willing to do the job and ensure you appointing a substitute executor if your first choice is unable or unwilling. Another option is to appoint a solicitor or trustee company as your executor.

Update your will when your circumstances change Starting a de facto relationship (with someone of either the same or opposite sex), marriage, separation or divorce, having a baby or your executor becoming unavailable are common examples of changing circumstances. If one of your beneficiaries dies, part of your will may no longer be valid and the gift you leave to them may instead be distributed according to state government rules – so it's important to name substitute beneficiaries in your will. Another reason to keep updating is that the value of certain assets, such as shares, may change over time, >

D.I.Y. WILL KITS

AUSTRALIAN WILL KIT

Supplier: National Call Centre
Price: $38.08 (inc. postage, credit card fee)
Bought at: www.nationalcallcentre.com.au
Description: Comprehensive booklet with two will forms.

Good points

- Contains warning to obtain legal advice if your situation is complex or complicated.
- Covers issues relating to children, taxation, executor and superannuation.

Bad Points

- Does not explain what would constitute a complex or complicated situation. Deals with complex situations, such as CGT and trusts for children, in an everyday manner without repeating the warning to get legal advice.
- Contains a statement that the executor cannot be a witness, which can be incorrect as long the executor is not a beneficiary.

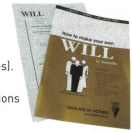
Verdict

Provides a good amount of information and additional background material, is very accessible and well-structured for a well-informed user.

Simple will: Good. Additional expert advice recommended if you have young children or adult beneficiaries with special needs.

Complex will: Not recommended.

HOW TO MAKE YOUR OWN WILL IN AUSTRALIA



Supplier: Legal Kits of Victoria
Price: $36.30 (inc. postage)
Bought at: www.legalkits.com.au
Description: Comprehensive booklet with six will forms (three different types).

Good points

- Covers the issues concerning provisions for children and beneficiaries with special needs.
- Provides some information regarding superannuation and taxation.
- Issue of witnesses is correctly explained.
- Best coverage of the issue of executors of the will kits reviewed.
- Will forms provide more options than those in the other kits.

Bad points

- Does not contain a warning to obtain legal advice if your situation is complex or complicated, and seems to discourage the user from seeking expert financial or legal advice.
- Does not make a distinction between complex and simple wills.

Verdict

Of the four DIY kits, this is the most informative and best overall. Provides a comprehensive amount of information and detailed background material, is very accessible and well structured for a well-informed user.

Simple will: Very good. Additional expert advice recommended if you have young children or adult beneficiaries with special needs.

Complex will: Not recommended.

DID YOU KNOW?

What about superannuation?

Super can make up a large part of your assets, particularly if you've taken out life insurance through your super fund. However, you may only have limited control on how the money will be distributed should you die. The person who receives your super money is determined by the trustee of your super fund, and is usually a dependant, such as your spouse and/or children, otherwise it goes towards your estate.

Some (but not all) super funds accept a "binding nomination", which gives you certainty on who receives how much. You must update a binding nomination every three years, otherwise it goes out of date. You can usually only nominate a financial dependant – your spouse, children or alternatively your estate – as the beneficiary. The tax treatment for super money differs depending on the beneficiary. While financial dependants and your spouse receive the money tax-free, non-dependent beneficiaries, such as adult children, may have to pay tax.

TRAPS TO BEWARE OF WHEN DRAFTING YOUR OWN WILL

Financial arrangements made in your lifetime, such as debts, joint tenancy or binding financial arrangements, don't die with you – they must be honoured by your estate.

Superannuation is a minefield: selecting the beneficiaries may be up to the discretion of the trustee of your fund – someone you've never met and who does not know you or your family situation (see left).

HOW WE ANALYSE

Out two experts received a copy of the four kits and answered specific questions, including about how they rated the structure of the will kit and statements made on issues regarding children, executor, superannuation and taxation.

We summarised the comments and made our own assessment to rate each of the kits for its effectiveness in drafting both a simple and complicated will for a well-informed user who has familiarised themselves with the topic.

Simple will A couple or single person with only a few beneficiaries and harmonious family situation, possibly owning their own home and otherwise straightforward possessions, such as household goods and a few bank accounts.

Complex will This could include blended families, such as children from more than one relationship, and complex financial affairs. The will-maker may have a DIY super fund or complex tax arrangements, such as owning shares and managed funds that would attract capital gains tax; could need or already have a trust; own a business; or may not want to provide for someone who would usually expect to inherit from their estate.

MEET THE EXPERTS

Dr John de Groot, BA LLB PhD, Special Counsel, is Chairman of the Queensland Law Society's Succession Law Committee and of its Advisory Committee on Specialist Accreditation (Succession Law). He is also an adjunct Professor of law T. C. Beirne School of Law at the University of Queensland.

Russell Robertson has been an accredited Wills & Estates Specialist for 16 years, and is a member of the Law Institute of Victoria's Probate, Wills and Administration Committee. Russell is an instructor at the Leo Cussen Institute and makes presentations organised by the Law Institute of Victoria.

< so you might want to check your assets are still distributed fairly. As a rule of thumb, you should review and update your will every five years.

Keep your will in a safe place where it can be found

"If it can't be found and was in possession of the will-maker, the law assumes it has been destroyed by the will-maker with the intention of revoking it," says our expert, Dr John de Groot. Thus, making sure your executor knows where your will can be found can prevent problems later on.

What happens if you don't make a will?

If you die without a will, your assets are divided according to legislation that differs between states. In SA, for example, your spouse would receive your personal assets, the first $100,000 of your estate and half of the remainder, with the rest divided among your children in equal shares. In NSW, however, your spouse is entitled to your whole estate.

State legislation also differs in the case of de facto spouses. They are usually only accepted as your spouse if you have lived together for two or more years.

Estate planning

A will is only part of a comprehensive estate plan. Estate planning means passing on all your assets to your dependants in the most tax-effective and financially beneficial way. It considers assets bequeathed in your will as well as beyond its scope, such as superannuation. It also considers other important issues, such as appointing a guardian or establishing a trust to take care of the future needs of any dependent children, should you and your partner both die unexpectedly.

CHOICE verdict

Will kits can be an excellent research tool when drafting your own will. Depending on your situation and skills, they can enable you to do a DIY will. However, CHOICE recommends obtaining some expert advice, particularly if you have small children, complex financial affairs or a complicated family situation. ■

CASE STUDY

Will 'null and void'

CHOICE staff member Joe Sydney was the executor of his father's estate. Joe's father received legal advice when preparing the will, but handled signing and storage himself. Joe discovered the will was incorrectly signed, as his father had come to the first witness with the will already signed and afterwards went to the second witness. Joe's solicitor told him a court may consider the will "null and void", as it needed to be signed in the presence of the two witnesses at the same time.

The main beneficiaries of the will were Joe, his stepmother, sister and his father's silblings. Joe's mother, his father's first wife, was not included.

Before he appealed to the court to grant probate, Joe got written statements from all beneficiaries, as well as his mother, promising they wouldn't contest the will.

There are so many product recalls we may not be able to print all of them. For comprehensive recall information go to the Product Recalls Australia website: www.recalls.gov.au, or call the ACCC's Product Safety Policy section on 02 6243 1262. Companies often rent 1800 numbers for a couple of months after a recall is announced. If the number given is no longer operating, phone the manufacturer or retailer.

HOT WATER SYSTEM Rheem Australia has recalled **Rheem 275L Heavy Duty Commercial Indoor Gas Water Heater**, models 621275N0 and 621275P0, manufactured between 1 July 2008 and 20 November 2009. The model number and date of manufacture can be found on the product label located on top of the heater jacket.
The problem Under extended operating conditions, the outer jacket temperature may exceed safe temperatures, and may pose a risk of burns to anyone who comes in contact with it. Any combustible materials stored near or against the water heater are also at risk of catching alight.
What to do Remove any combustible materials from around the heater, and ensure no one comes into contact with it. Call 1800 063 018, 8am-8pm AEDST, to arrange for Rheem to conduct a free onsite service modification.

FOOD Dong Nam Trading has recalled **Bravo Pistachio Revolution Ice Confectionary Ice Cream**, **Bravo White Vanilla Confectionary Ice Cream** and **Bravo Choco Chunk Confectionary Ice Cream**, 150g packs, cardboard wrapped ice cream cones. No best before date is specified, however the current English label states "1 year from date of production" with the dates of production on label stated as 2009 June 18, 2009 October 15 and 2009 July 30.
The problem They contain peanuts and milk, which isn't declared on the packaging.
What to do Don't eat them if you have an allergy to milk or peanuts. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund, or for more information call (02) 9758 3076.

VASE dusk is recalling **Large Cube Vase 40cm**, Plu 33149 or 2347, EAN 9900000331498, a clear rectangle shaped glass vase, 40cm in height.
The problem The glass in the middle section of the vase is quite thin and could shatter and crack when handled.
What to do Ensure the vase is handled by the base only, and do not handle the middle section. Return it to your nearest dusk store for a refund. For more information, call (08) 9449 1900, 9am-5pm AWST (11am-7pm AEST).

SNATCH STRAP Lion Consolidated has recalled **Lion 9 metre snatch strap**, 6500kg, model number LA400A7. It was sold in Queensland since 1 October 2008 at Bunnings, Mitre 10, independent hardware stores and automotive stores.
The problem It's missing a product information warning label.
What to do Send the strap to Lion (Aust) Consolidated Pty Ltd, PO Box 510, Croydon, Vic, 3136, to have a information label attached. For more information, call (03) 9761 6199, email sales@lionaust.com.au or go to www.lion.net.au.

TOY Austwide Wholesalers has recalled **Weapon Hero Playset with Axe and Shield, 4 assorted**, item code TY1418, barcode number 9316341466421.
The problem Some points on the double-sided axe are quite sharp, potentially posing a danger to children.
What to do Remove it from the reach of children. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund.

CARAVAN FRIDGE/FREEZER Dometic has recalled **Dometic 175L Absorption Caravan Refrigerator/Freezer**, model RM7851L, serial range 401xxxxx to 734xxxxx, sold between February 2006 and December 2007.
The problem A screw securing the cooling unit could be faulty, and in extreme cases the unit could move and create vibration at the gas tube connection, creating a fire hazard.
What to do Don't use it again until it has been attended to by a Dometic service agent. Call 1800 212121, 9am-5pm AEST, Monday-Friday, and follow the prompts to "Service and Technical Advice". An inspection and upgrade will be arranged free of charge.

MOTOR VEHICLE Toyota Motor Corporation has recalled **Toyota Prius ZVW30 vehicles**, within the following VIN ranges: WMI:JTD. VDS: KN36U*, frame number range (VIS) 01000092 – 01157273, production period 7/4/2009 – 27/1/2010; WMI:JTD. VDS:KN36U*, frame number range (VIS) 05000003 – 05118023, production period 13/1/2009 – 27/1/2010.
The problem The braking force may be slightly degraded on completion of ABS activation.
What to do Toyota will write to all affected owners, or call 1800 252 097 for more information.

MOTOR VEHICLE Ford has recalled certain **Ford F-series** (built 1993 – 2001), **Ford Explorer** (UN/UQ/US and UT built 1995 to 2002) and **Ford Econoline vehicles** (built 1998 to 2000).
The problem The under-hood speed control deactivation switch mounted on the brake system may leak, possibly resulting in an under-hood fire.
What to do Ford will write to owners of affected vehicles, or call 1800 503 672 for more information.

MOTOR VEHICLE Toyota has recalled **Daihatsu Feroza (F300, F310RG)**, **Daihatsu Rocky (F80/85/87)** and **Daihatsu F9# series model vehicles (F90/93/95/97/98)**.
The problem A fuel evaporative emission check valve may develop a crack, possibly causing fuel vapour to enter the cabin and pose a fire hazard.
What to do Toyota will write to all affected owners.

CARAVAN AND CAMPER Jayco Corporation has recalled **Jayco Caravans and Campers**, selected chassis numbers between L12153 and L52068.
The problem They may have been manufactured with accessories that may have the weight of the van on the cusp of its 1450kg axle limit.
What to do Contact your local Jayco dealer to have the axle replaced with a 1600kg axle.

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Pesticides, household May
Pet insurance Jul
Phones
camera Jun
cordless landline Aug, Feb
smart Feb
Phone cards Oct
Pizzas Apr
Plastic food containers Feb
Pool fences Jun
Potatoes, frozen products Jul
Pressure cleaners Feb
Pressure cookers May
Printers
all-in-one Mar
colour laser Feb

Radios, digital Jul, Apr
Refrigerators – see Fridges
Reverse mortgages Oct

Screening tests, health Apr
Set-top boxes Feb
Shelf-stable meals Feb
Shonkys, The Nov
Shopping, psychology tricks Apr
Simmer sauces Aug
Smartphones Feb
Smoke alarms Mar
Social media Feb
Solar (PV) panels Aug
Sound bars May
Sparkling wine Dec/Jan
Speaker docks Jun
Standby energy Oct
Stock, chicken Oct
Strollers Nov, Dec/Jan*
Superannuation Jun
Supermarkets
psychology Apr
survey Dec/Jan

Takeaway meals Jun
Tax tips Jul
Telephones – see Phones
Televisions
66cm Jun
81cm Mar
117cm Sep
Toasters, four-slice Apr
Toddler products Sep
Tomatoes Oct
Toothpaste Aug
Trans fats Jul
Travel money May
Tyres Jul

Vacuum cleaners
bag/bin Jul, Nov, Feb
Varicose veins Jun

Washing machines Aug, Mar
Weddings Dec/Jan
Will kits Apr
Wine, sparkling Dec/Jan
Wireless technology Jun

Yoghurt, premium Oct

Zoom lenses Aug

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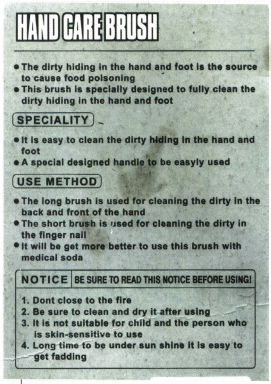
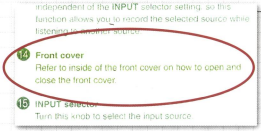
The winner of this month's best entry goes to P. Heath, who'd actually prefer extra topping on his pizza. Thanks also to D. Wilkins, G. Hilford, B. Armstrong, J. Vine, C. Shelton, C. Christmass and J. Luckett for their contributions to this month's Hard Word. If you have any examples you think deserve to be on this page, send them to The Hard Word, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204. Please don't email us your entries – we need the unmarked originals. CHOICE VIDEO Go to www.choice.com.au to see the latest Hard Word on video.


HAND CARE BRUSH
• The dirty hiding in the hand and foot is the source to cause food poisoning
• This brush is specially designed to fully clean the dirty hiding in the hand and foot
SPECIALITY
• It is easy to clean the dirty hiding in the hand and foot
• A special designed handle to be easyly used
USE METHOD
• The long brush is used for cleaning the dirty in the back and front of the hand
• The short brush is used for cleaning the dirty in the finger nail
• It will be get more better to use this brush with medical soda
NOTICE BE SURE TO READ THIS NOTICE BEFORE USING!
1. Dont close to the fire
2. Be sure to clean and dry it after using
3. It is not suitable for child and the person who is skin-sensitive to use
4. Long time to be under sun shine it is easy to get fadding

AT LAST, NO MORE FOOD POISONING FOR THOSE WHO EAT WITH THEIR FEET!
Question is, was the monkey employed for product inception or copywriting?

TECHNICALLY CORRECT, BUT ...
Surely a more appropriate pricing comparison unit than "litre" could have been chosen for this flea treatment? Like millilitre?


independent of the INPUT selector setting, so this function allows you to record the selected source while listening to another source.
16 Front cover
Refer to inside of the front cover on how to open and close the front cover.
15 INPUT selector
Turn this knob to select the input source.

ER ... ANY TIPS TO GET US STARTED?
Reader Don Wilkins says he's still trying to open the front cover of his Yamaha amplifier ...

NEW FOODWORKS
ALDGATE
Opens 7am Thursday 4th February
Special SAVE up to $4.79
$5 on us!
BUY 1 GET 1 FREE
FOODWORKS
Offer valid from Thursday 29th October until Sunday 8th November 2009 only. See in-store for full Terms & Conditions.

STEP BACK IN TIME
This apparently generous $5 cash back offer from FoodWorks was only valid before the store actually opened.

DOES YOUR FROZEN PIZZA TASTE LIKE CARDBOARD?
Frozen pizzas didn't do too well in our taste test featured in this issue (page 57), but putting extra topping on the packaging probably won't help.

LET'S HOPE THIS SPELLING IS RECTUMFIED FOR NEXT TIME

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